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ABSTRACT

Focusing on three literature teachers who have lived with and through the changing representations of the discipline, this paper, an examination of the nature of inquiry in literature education, describes the multiple realities that such teachers must negotiate for themselves and their students. The paper discusses conceptions of reflective inquiry; the content and processes of inquiry; and kinds of inquiry, such as autobiographical inquiry, curriculum inquiry, pedagogical inquiry, and inquiry of possibility. The paper concludes with three essential principles that summarize the formulations, processes, and outcomes of the inquiry: (1) although practice as product is the observable act, teaching, as these teachers demonstrated, is a process; (2) working within the school culture may not determine, but does affect, teachers' images of possible and desirable teaching and learning; and (3) one common thread in the three teachers' motivation for inquiry was their need to confront the rapidly changing views of teaching and learning literature. A figure listing principles of curriculum planning and a figure listing critical questions in learning literature are included. Contains 110 references. (RS)

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NCTE Concept Papers

Concept Paper No. 12

Composing a Teaching Life: Partial, Multiple, and Sometimes Contradictory Representations of Teaching and Learning Literature

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Teachers College, Columbia University

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Composing a Teaching Life:
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My story of literature education begins with my grandmother reading from *The Thousand Nights and a Night.* She would take one of the Burton volumes from the bookcase, the leather cracked from use, and I would slip nearer sleep, just as her own ten children had decades before, listening to her voice bringing stories of faraway places and adventures, stories of sadness, intrigue, and sometimes death. Now, it was my turn to be initiated into literature.

On her eastern Idaho farm in the late forties, it was a time when most fathers had come home from the war and were well into the rhythms of their work and daily lives. Not mine. What remained was my mother's memory of him, and the few trinkets and medals that were wrapped in tissue in a suit box, on a closet shelf next to the bedroom where my mother, brother, and I slept. The rest was in shallow earth of rice fields somewhere between Tokyo and Yokohama.

My memories of that period are best understood in the context of his absence. And my grandmother, attempting to fill the space, shared with me the literature that she loved. It was before and during my early elementary school experience when she read *Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn,* the stories from the Grimms' collection and Hans Christian Andersen. Not long after, I entered the world of *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist,* of *Little Women* and *Alice in Wonderland.* I constructed a world of experience and imagining far beyond where I lived and located myself within the spirit of the grandmother who led me into a life with literature. In the text of her reading more than in the text of the individual stories, the meaning of what she did and did not do stays with me. She invited and nurtured. Through conversations about what we read, we negotiated our private and shared understandings, many times partial, multiple, and often contradictory. Sometimes she led me to

revisit an event or a character's motivation; other times she nudged me to see myself in what I read, or to create a new story. She did not overburden my meanings with her own.

For my grandmother, it was the sharing that gave her pleasure. Her family was grown; the farm had been given, piece by small piece, to her children. Preparing meals, hanging laundry, and reading to a young child filled her days. For me, these are the first conscious memories of my life of imagining, searching out, and experiencing those worlds beyond the small house where we lived. Reading led me into new geographic and spiritual landscapes as words stretched beyond that small plot of land with its one chicken coop, two cows, half-acre garden plot, and small house where my grandmother and mother did their best to raise a boy and a girl who would find it necessary to step out from that quiet world into a world moving at full speed, one far beyond their imaginings.

The time rushed toward 1966. I began teaching literature amidst a pile of books--literary criticism, various anthologies, teachers' guides, and Cliffs Notes. I talked about literature in classrooms. Students mostly watched. For at least the first several years of my teaching experience, students wrote timed essays, author papers, discussed what they thought I wanted to hear, and waited for the bell. Finally, I realized that I had taken on a literature teacher's identity, like putting on a new coat. I was reproducing what literature teachers from my school experiences had done or what I assumed they were supposed to do. It wasn't until I began to look at myself as the subject of my own history and to read theorists and practitioners' accounts that I questioned this socially constructed image of the literature teacher and began to negotiate the image and identity of the literature teacher that I was becoming. As Deborah Britzman (1991) has suggested, "Indeed, the significant albeit hidden work of learning to teach concerns negotiating with conflicting representations and desires. One must ferret out how multiple interpretations of the meanings of social experience come to position one's identity as a teacher. This involves scrutiny into how we come to know

ourselves when we are trying to become a teacher" (p. 24).

As I traced my own developing history as a teacher, I came to believe that teaching is a composing act, dependent on cognitive and social processes, drawing upon personal and public histories of schooling, wherein processes of generating, rehearsing, and revising are necessary parts in the messy and chaotic work of creating teachers and classrooms. Through continuing inquiry, I am composing my life as a teacher. By examining my personal history, I have become more cognizant of the complex relationships among beliefs, school culture, and experience, and of the ways in which these relationships inform my teaching practices. While it is only recently that I have begun to formally study other teachers' inquiries into these multiple, overlapping, or contradictory interactions, early revelations about myself have led me to examine the professional literature on reflective inquiry.

Conceptions of Reflective Inquiry

Although there is a long tradition of and continuous thread of interest in reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schaefer, 1967; Feiman, 1979; Korthagen, 1985; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Grimmett & Erickson, 1988), it took an outsider who wrote of engineers, architects, town planners and psychologists to catch the imagination of educators who were searching for alternative ways to explore professional knowledge (Schön, 1983, 1987). Schön recognized that "the multiplicity of conflicting views poses a predicament for the practitioner who must choose among multiple approaches to practice or devise . . . ways of combining them" (1983, p. 17). While many definitions, conceptions, and terms have been applied to reflection--Alan Tom's (1984) "moral craft," Shulman's (1987) "wisdom of practice" (p. 321), Freire's (1970) "praxis" and "problem posing," and Cuban's (1984) "unlearn in order to learn"--each is loosely associated with processes through which new sense is made of prior knowledge. Zumwalt (1982) recommends deliberative reflection on competing versions of knowledge to inform but not to direct practice; Sanders and McCutcheon (1986) consider the situational context of competing views;

MacKinnon (1987) emphasizes a process and cyclical approach to reflection--problem setting, reframing, and resolution; and Pugach and Johnson (1990) examine the dialectic between past and present understandings. Virginia Richardson (1990) urges that conditions should be established that foster reflective teaching. "What is needed," in her view, "is a way of looking at the concept of reflection-in-action, at how teachers learn such reflection, and at programs designed to develop such learning that match the paradigm inherent in the concept" (p. 14).

In the field of English education specifically, researchers and practitioners are interested in nurturing teachers who are "active learners, modeling for their students an inquisitive, reflective, analytic attitude towards knowledge" (Thompson & Williams, 1985, p. 14). Mayher's (1990) "uncommon sense" view of education emphasizes teachers who improvise, frame problems in new ways, and engage in hypothesis testing as they reflect on practice. Britton (1987) suggests that "every lesson should be for the teacher an inquiry, some further discovery, a quiet form of research, and that time to reflect, draw inferences and plan further inquiry is also essential" (p. 15). Lester and Mayher (1987) call for critical professional inquiry that moves "outside the teaching act in order to examine it" (p. 204). The teacher can "reflect on her tentative solutions, collaborate with others on the possible avenues available, and risk making mistakes because mistakes are an inevitable part of building new roads" (p. 209). In his article "The Well-Told Teaching Story: A Resource for Teachers of English," Jon Wagner (1989) describes the importance of teachers' stories as reflection. These stories are the "narrative wisdom within which teachers work" and can serve as the basis for reflective inquiry (p. 114). Knoblauch and Brannon (1988) support storytelling as a way of reflecting on teaching, for "the habit of reflection that teachers can derive from their inquiries will make their teaching practices more thoughtful, more responsible to students' needs, more deliberately (as opposed to casually) flexible" (p. 26). Vaughan (1990) assumes that "reflective practice is much like an undeveloped land: its potential for growth will be determined by the

diligence, rigor, and wisdom that comes from within the teacher, and the nurturance and opportunity it receives from without" (p. xi). Our field is filled with calls for inquisitiveness, improvisation, examination, risk taking, and reflection. These are the dicta, but how do literature teachers inquire into their discipline, one filled increasingly with debates on what and how to teach?

Perhaps inevitably, literature teachers confront multiple and contradictory beliefs about purposes, curriculum, and pedagogy. "The teaching of literature has from the beginning been under considerable pressure to formulate itself as a body of knowledge" (Applebee, 1974, p. 245). Literature teachers express feelings of powerlessness when confronting competing versions of validated knowledge and practice (Vinz & Kirby, 1991). Following the winds of change in literature studies, as outlined by Applebee (1974), it is easy to notice a near melodramatic search for purposes: a literary canon that transmits cultural and ethical values; literature as experience or literature as transaction that engages readers with text; or New Criticism that focuses on the conventions of literature. Practitioners, researchers, and theorists offer a confusing array of purposes. Behind all these the literature anthology looms larger than life in most classrooms, offering literature teachers an array of activities and questions. The emphasis on exposure to great authors in the cultural heritage model (Muller, 1967), along with an emphasis on content and close reading of the text as espoused by the New Critics, has given way to various reader-response and transactional approaches. Rosenblatt's (1938/1968, 1978) theory has been adapted into popularized versions of theory-into-practice in secondary literature classes (Probst, 1984). As she describes it, reading is a co-creation between text, reader, and the larger community. The theory is not only psycholinguistic but also sociolinguistic, because she emphasizes "the attitudes and social relations fostered by the way literature is taught" (Pradl, 1991, p. 23). The changing emphasis on the authority of readers and texts has caused teachers of literature to confront their own constructions of beliefs and practices as well

as their investments in habit or preference. How classroom communities are defined, how they operate, and the explicit and implicit messages that grow out of theories about readers and reading challenge more traditionally legitimated discourses on teaching and learning literature.

Teachers must negotiate their personal histories with the changing conceptions in the field. Teachers' past experiences have been shown to influence not only their readings but also the readings and practices they validate in classrooms. Zancanella's (1991) study of five teachers leads him to suggest that "pedagogically useful knowledge exists in these five teachers' personal approaches to literature" (p. 5). Bloland (1983) reveals in her study of four high school English teachers that teacher choice rests "on deeply cherished beliefs and constructs about language and learning" (p. 264) which she defines as "the inner curriculum--what teachers think they ought to be doing" (p. 268). Thinking through the ways in which past and present experiences inform each other, no teacher is free of history and context. From this, I assume all teachers are constrained and emancipated by their places of experience as well as by the challenge of possibility. Peter Elbow (1990) contemplates this double-edged truth with an eye to the future:

> In the end I am tempted to say we are a profession both polarized and paralyzed around literature. We see the problems: it unreasonably privileges certain texts and certain kinds of language and certain kinds of reading; it heightens certain destructive political divisions in the profession; it destructively narrows the profession. But in those very problems we cannot help but also see virtues. (p. 101)

Against this backdrop of tensions, I wonder how teachers of literature, those who have lived with and through the changing representations of the discipline, describe the multiple realities that they must negotiate for themselves and their students.

Discovering the Content and Processes of Inquiry

Faced with questions about what literature study means and to whom, how do literature teachers inquire into their purposes and practices? How do they make use of their knowledge and beliefs to determine how and what they teach? What are the processes through which they examine their beliefs about and practices of literature education? When I left secondary English teaching to become an English educator, I began to consider how literature teachers inquire into the uncertainties and multiplicities of their work as literature educators. I wanted to understand more fully what they valued as teachers and how their personal and professional histories informed those values. As Bruner (1990) notes, "To insist upon explanations in terms of 'causes' simply bars us from trying to understand how human beings interpret their worlds" (p. xiii). Rather, to "be conscious of how we come to our knowledge and as conscious as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives" (p. 30) is the goal of inquiry. So it was with an intent to illuminate the nature of inquiry in literature education that Beth, Joe, and Jane--three committed teachers, referred to here pseudonymously--and I began our inquiry into their constructions of teaching and learning literature.

Introducing the Major Players

Jane Weston has been teaching for fifteen years in elementary classrooms. During the year in which we documented her inquiry process and content, she taught fourth grade. Jane is actively involved in language arts curriculum projects, textbook adoption committees, and a reading group whose members discuss professional literature monthly. Jane earned a master's degree in early childhood education. Her earlier experiences in teacher education were "fairly nondescript and it seemed like we were mostly getting initiated into the language of teaching . . . . I did have a few good models of teachers who

were really trying to get students thinking and involved in learning."* Jane experienced reading and writing workshops in language arts methods classes. "That opened up some possibilities . . . . As I think about that now it seems progressive for the early eighties. Going back for the master's degree later also revived my energy and interest." As Jane points out, "My own learning is enriched by what my students bring to me through their questions, frustrations, and successes. I've learned so much about literature from listening to them." It is important to her that students love reading and feel satisfaction and success when they pick up a book. "I've often hoped that when they read to their own children--well, you know--that they'll remember with pleasure some of the stories we shared together and pass on a love of those to their children."

Beth Carter has been teaching for eighteen years in middle schools. She taught three seventh-grade, one eighth-grade, and two ninth-grade English classes the year we inquired together. Beth received a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Since that time she has been actively involved in district curriculum revision as a facilitator and writer, textbook adoption committees, and a monthly reading group. Beth recalls that she had little experience in education classes until her master's work. "I came in by alternate routes. I had content area background and the French along with a Fulbright experience that got me through the door and into the contract office. Things were much looser then." Beth believes her teaching experience has been the best teacher. "I've learned a lot along the way, but part of that happens because I'm teaching at the same time I'm learning. I don't know what it would be like to sit in classrooms and talk about teaching without ever having done it. Teaching literature has always allowed me to find a reason to raise issues that are critical to the survival of decent human beings. We

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*All quotes from Jane, Beth, and Joe are taken from my in-depth and lengthy conversations with them about our teaching lives.

develop sympathy, compassion, and the greatest of all human qualities--empathy for others. I want to help students see what literature can offer them."

Joe Conrad has been teaching for nineteen years at the high school level. His literature courses have included American literature, world humanities, Russian literature, a genre approach to world literature, and a chronological approach to British literature. The year we documented his inquiry, Joe taught three sections of senior English and two sections of English-in-the-workplace. Joe earned a master's degree in classical studies and a second master's degree in English literature. He has been actively involved in district curriculum projects and textbook adoption committees, and has written numerous district curriculum guides at the high school level. For Joe, "methods classes were really at the tail end of my work. I was in the Jesuit seminary first of all, and I left with this traditional and classical education. I didn't think about teaching." Joe believes most of his opinions were formed as a student, and most of the classes he took for certification taught him to replicate what he had seen as a student. "In fact, I did that for years, but sort of grew into my own by having colleagues who enjoyed talking about teaching or questioned teaching. I started playing around with ideas late in my career. I realized I mostly heard my own voice in the classroom. That was like a whack on the side of the head. Just maybe kids needed the same chances to fall in love with pieces of literature."

Writing this after spending seven months of intensive study with Beth, Jane, and Joe is my way of considering what they taught me, documenting what they taught themselves, and speculating on what the value of an examination of their inquiry might be to others. During our last formal session together, Beth said, "every step we've taken is part of a joint story. I see that now. The multiple versions of teaching and learning that we've relived for ourselves or told each other helped me think about what's behind what I do. I've found new ways to think about who I am as a teacher. There's so much inside of and underneath and around the day-to-day

classroom enactment." There is a message in Beth's statement that can't be glossed over. These teachers helped me consider more carefully how beliefs, experiences, and practices intersect and how centrally important it is for them and for those of us who are English educators to understand the complexities of composing a teaching life. For too long, ours have been, in Foucault's terms "subjugated knowledges" (1980, p. 80).

How often are teachers' perspectives recognized, listened to, and valued? How often are their voices central to an understanding of their teaching lives? The words, narratives, and scenarios from classrooms that express the dynamics of Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's teaching, as well as the story of their inquiry, will unfold in the following pages. There are four general themes of inquiry that frame the following discussion. The first is specifically concerned with autobiographical inquiry, the relationship between these teachers' personal histories with literature and their beliefs about teaching and learning literature. The second theme focuses on curriculum inquiry--Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's articulation of curriculum in literature education and the role of agency and opposition in the lived practice of curriculum construction. The third theme highlights their pedagogical inquiry, reflections on the classroom enactments that make concrete the first two themes through the day-to-day events that occur in their classrooms. Finally, the fourth theme is a detailing of Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's inquiries of possibility, their ways of coming to recognize the dilemmas, multiple representations, and inconsistencies in their work and how these lead to speculations about future practices.

Autobiographical Inquiry

The search to pattern what I know, feel, or believe about myself takes many forms. Stories I tell about my experiences, those significant remembrances of people who have influenced me in one way or another, or who have helped me sort through the rich messiness of who and what I am, continue to articulate my identity. For me, at least, there is a hunger to find connections between my past and present life. I am reminded of the graveyard scene in

Hamlet. Hamlet cradles the skull of Yorick, looking in and through what remains of an artifact of Hamlet's life in memory. Yorick, the court jester. Yorick, as Hamlet remembers him, "hath borne me on his back a thousand times." I believe that digging up such artifacts, the skeletons of past life, can inform our present and future. In Hamlet's pessimism of the moment, he couldn't unearth from his memories of Yorick more than the shades of human folly and invention. Learning from the past, finding who and what helped in shaping us, is a medium for change. Hamlet's was a life and death struggle for spirit. Ours, in teaching, is a struggle for spirit of a different kind--one that suggests teachers must find places where the silences give way to voice, to multiple articulations of who and what we are about, rather than succumb to inaction or single representations. "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy . . . . Where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" (*Hamlet* 5.1). To unearth the bones, relics, and rituals is to remember. I yearn to dig up the artifacts that are part of the teacher who I am today, to cradle the past in my hands, to question it, and to find the infinite fancy and songs.

Bruner (1986) suggests that we construct ourselves through narrative. These ways of knowing, often fragments, nonlinear and nonsequential snapshots of our lives, reconstitute moments and episodes into patterns or themes. Storying is a process of inquiring into ourselves, an attempt to make sense of our lives. Selecting, comparing, organizing, and revising these stories are ways to illustrate and explain what we believe and why. The transformation of lived experiences into words is one way of beginning to understand.

Some researchers illustrate how teachers draw on personal experiences to construct ideological and pedagogical theories for teaching. There are suggestions that teachers' experiences in and memories of their time spent as students may influence how they teach (Lortie, 1975; Woods, 1984) or may perpetuate conservatism in teaching (Cuban, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Witherell

and Noddings (1991) present a series of research inquiries into various facets of educational experiences in *Stories Lives Tell.* Storytelling gives shape and expression to the narratives of life. In one instance, the stories help pre-service teachers constitute explanations for the reasons they act or believe in certain ways. In another, teachers reveal the experiential knowledge that informs their repertoire of knowledge and practice. Yet another suggests that the autobiographical act is seen as incomplete until the teller becomes its reader. Taken together, these stories of story describe the power of narrative as a tool in the formation and understanding of self and others. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) assert that "our imagination has been captured by the possibility of studying experience rather than using experience as a contextual given for educational discourse" (p. 260). And so it was with Beth, Jane, and Joe. They set out to determine the possible meanings of their stories.

What was suggestive about Jane's, Beth's, and Joe's autobiographical inquiries was how the authority of their early experiences continued to influence their teaching. Through inquiry, they began to challenge the authority of experience and to rethink the relationship between their present work and past beliefs and experiences. The purpose was not to sentimentalize and overgeneralize, or to be aware when that was happening. In part, this required that they distance themselves and read the text of their retellings and remembrances to unearth the constructions of literature education that have contributed to their identity as teachers. When past and present were considered as dimensions of the whole experience, these teachers authored new stories that transgressed particular moments, beliefs, or actions. This did not occur to the exclusion of the subjective, the logical, or the spiritual. Rather, a web of feeling and meaning emerged that took them beyond concreteness and the particularities of any one experience.

Teachers' Purposes in Literature Education

Beth's personal experiences helped her see that literature can open a world of possibilities, "a world of questions that get readers to respond and think

about life and make connections with their own lives and others' lives. I think now that all the adults in my family expected me to think about what I read and to make some sense out of it." Joe indicated that his father's acting out of stories was important to his teaching. "I think," he recalled, "of how he got inside the literature and lived it through those performances of his. I've been willing to risk doing that in class because he was an important model." Jane recalled that reading was a pleasurable experience, and "the joy may come through the beauty of the language or the ideas. I don't wear the overalls with the deep pockets that my father kept books in, but the books are there within easy reach. I make it a point for students to know that." As Beth, Jane, and Joe continued to examine their experiences, they began to understand how this personal history with literature was formative in shaping their beliefs about literature education.

Beth's high regard for opportunities to think, talk about, and share this record of human thought and imagination is central in the narrative of her recollected experiences. "That's kind of my Southern background, that idea that literature is instructive. Sometimes I may think I'm reading to be entertained, but if I'm being entertained, I'm learning something as well." Beth remembers that the significant adults in her family would say, "Why does this happen? Why can she cut off their tails with a carving knife? Is this really fair?" Beth finds this framework for literature's instructive purposes compelling, perhaps because her initiation into literature's purposes provided her with a strong example. "My grandfather wanted a response. He wanted to know what you liked and why you liked it--what was good, what struck a chord. With him there was always dialogue going on."

Joe finds that "there's a whole aesthetic side to literature." His emphasis on developing the aesthetic sensibilities is a thread that weaves into the fabric of Joe's autobiographical account. Often in discussion he referred to Orwell's (1950) "Shooting an Elephant." "It's a hell of a good piece. It's just beautiful. There's that moment and then the elephant becomes suddenly old and begins to sag slightly." His belief in aesthetic appreciation is informed

through his father's deliberate way of focusing attention on the potential of language to evoke images or to "recreate a feeling through the sound as much as the idea. My dad got me thinking by asking questions about language, and he emphasized the beauty of a passage when he'd read and reread." Joe emphasizes the importance of preserving the oral tradition of literature. "I'd say that my early experiences sort of set that purpose in mind that literature needs to be heard. My father had this beautiful reading voice. I'd like to think that reading from the page can't ever take the place of literature as performance." Connected closely with Joe's concern for the development of an aesthetic sensibility is his belief that part of the purpose of literature education is to provide models for writers. "I learn from other writers. Reading is a way to help readers discover the good three sentences that reach out and grab us in." That, in turn, as Joe sees it, translates into readers' understanding of the writer's resources.

Jane sees literature education as a series of experiences with and exposure to various kinds of literature that bring readers "to understand more places, emotions, and ideas than they experience from their own life. It's a way of living vicariously." She does believe that literature education rather than reading instruction is the effective and humane way to develop students' reading skills. As modeled by her father, there are multitudinous ways of "talking about what we read--reciting, reading passages to someone else, talking through ideas." Jane believes that doing so opens up new experiences. As Jane sees it, students must carry away the love of literature. "Someday it will be armor for them, this love, that will help them through television and computers."

Their initiations into literature suggest that while each has a unique series of situations which cannot be reduced to generalization, it is critical to see how vital the home and family experiences were to their formative conceptions of what literature is and means. It is interesting that all three mentioned how the entrance of television into their lives threatened to take away the literature experiences in each household. All agreed that they

perhaps oversentimentalized their early experiences even with distance from the events. As Joe said, "It might be the Golden Age syndrome," but as Beth reminded him, "As long as these experiences provide positive models that influence my teaching, I'll live with that."

Their autobiographical inquiries raise important questions for me about how viewpoints, idealized or not, mediate or structure belief. Kelly (1955) speculates in his personal construct theory that a person's accumulated experiences may build a network of meanings--a construct--that continuously makes sense of, anticipates, or reformulates knowledge. These early experiences become near touchstones that contribute to their understanding of teaching. Recollecting their literature histories offered Beth, Joe, and Jane ways of repossessing the inner meaning from their early experiences. Just as with reading any story, they read their own stories, alert to the signs of character, setting, complexity of feeling, anticipated action, or motif. In the context of their teaching, Joe, Beth, and Jane tend to create narrative representations of past experiences that provide information about their present teaching choices and decisions. It might be argued that their narrative representations endow a kind of legitimacy to what they do, or suggest that these early and positive experiences with literature have made them good teachers. I resist representing the complex intersections and dimensions of lived experience too simply. On one hand, it could be suggested that there is a normalizing or idealizing impact that results in Beth's expectations that literature should be instructive, in Joe's view of the beauty of literature, or in Jane's concern that students must love the literature. As these recollections may become exaggerated conceptions, part of these teachers' work in inquiry was to begin to demystify their knowledge as some seamless authority. They began to consider the uncertainties and multiple representations.

The inquiry shifted to considerations of their school histories with literature which were filled with many taken-for-granted constructions--basal readers, recitation, anthologies, exams about literature, literary criticism, essays, and questions at the end of reading selections. Unlike the

contemporary, yet provisional, challenges asserted by transactional and reader-response approaches, literature study was predominantly exposure to classics, authority of text, and the apparatuses of textual criticism.

Beth's early school years were somewhat tortuous. She was not allowed to attend kindergarten because she was already reading. It was well known that a reader was a behavior problem. The next year, in first grade, Beth was told that she read wrong because she could not sound out the words. "It was a bad start. I remember the precursors of dittos and workbooks. Then, the family made a series of moves practically every year." As Beth describes her remembrances of herself in school, "I was always the new person, the kid in a corner with books, spending time in the school library reading." Beth began acting up in school by pulling fire alarms and plugging toilets. "Schools don't know how to deal with bad girls. They beat boys. They don't know what to do with girls." At ten, Beth was sent to live with her grandfather in the back hills of Tennessee. "He was wonderful. I lived with literature again. It was a central part of his life. When he deemed me civilized, at twelve, I went back home." As she describes it, her school experiences were routine after that. She has one or two memories of literature teachers who made a difference in her life. In eighth grade, in North Carolina, Beth had a teacher who completed a master's study on *Marshes of Glynn* by Sidney Lanier (1945). "She loved it so much and we were at the marshes. Right outside the door. Yet, it was still her love. We went along. She would read a section and we'd go look." In one or two other classes Beth felt connected to literature. As a senior in high school, Beth had a teacher who turned the class over to the students. "I thought it was brave of him. We made a film of *Beowulf.* We pooled our money and bought a 16 mm film and rented a gorilla suit. Beowulf arrived in a canoe with a hole cut in the bottom. It was a wonderful film and he wouldn't let anyone outside our group see it. He decided it was irreverent to *Beowulf.* He chickened out." Most of Beth's school experiences with literature were reading, explicating, and critiquing. There was no mystery, no connection to life and other human

beings. "I knew when I started teaching I didn't want to be like that."

Joe attended Catholic schools and mostly remembers the stress placed on oral reading. As he suggested, "I have a few mean nun stories, and so I just think of the angst I went through. I try to have a reasonably humane classroom. Kids are sometimes fearful about literature." From Joe's perspective, school literature was not the same as reading literature at home. "We had, if not reading circles, at least class oral reading all the way through high school. I'm not talking about reading performances, just getting the reading done." Most of Joe's education in literature was "very traditional--reading literature, analyzing it, hearing the official interpretation, finding out the background, and learning terminology." Joe doesn't have strong images of what his teachers did or didn't do. "A monotony. That's what I remember--read, discuss, pop quizzes, tests, essays. A lack of passion."

Jane remembers much the same pattern in studying literature. A few memorable experiences are included. Her sixth-grade teacher loved poetry. "We took the poems apart and dissected them and looked into them. I found that exhilarating. We memorized poems. Each student bought a paperback, *101 Best Poems,* for fifty-two cents. Frost was one of my favorites. I've never lost my appetite for poems. I'd read with a kind of perusal and a selfish way of reading just for enjoyment." A few teachers gave her "the tools and the confidence, both of them, to feel good about myself as a reader, but we glossed over the enjoyment."

To what extent can these school experiences provide examinations for critique and possibility? The role of power and authority that enables or prevents young readers from making a personal connection with literature is very much in teachers' hands. A sense of personal identification with the literature was nearly absent from the sanctioned work of literature study for these teachers. My point is that the disclosure of these experiences even in narrative demonstrates how Beth, Joe, and Jane felt that the pedagogy of their literature education was contextless, androgynous, disembodied, and dispassionate, even though there was an occasional particularized

remembrance. With few exceptions, school did not provide images or experiences of engagements with literature or of the emancipation of readers to mobilize their interests, strategies, and agendas when reading literature. Whether or how Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's school experiences can be said to determine their beliefs and practices is not easily generalizable. Precisely for this reason, the three began to probe more deeply into the role of teacher of literature that each of them has constructed and continues to construct.

The Role of Teacher In Literature Education

Although Beth, Jane, and Joe stated that their personal histories shaped much of their vision of the role of literature teacher, they acknowledge that their images of what teachers could do in classrooms was limited. Institutional, temporal, and societal constraints also affected the ways in which they could imagine how to teach literature differently. Many competing forces contest for a place in the composing of a teacher's identity.

For Beth, the teacher's role is to open the dialogue with and about a piece of literature and to help students find the importance for themselves. She believes that the role of the teacher is "to ask the questions and to really listen to what [students] get from the literature." The teacher is an enabler who facilitates students' readings. For Beth, a good teacher models this open and questioning attitude. "I listen to the students and expect from that model they will listen to one another." The models from her early life stay with her. "The best teaching times are when we are talking about a piece of literature, and everybody is throwing out ideas. My grandfather was the model of a questioner and prodder in nearly Socratic ways."

Beth's focus on student involvement is resisted by some students, parents, and administrators. Demands by students "for more clarity in assignments, more focused discussion, and knowing the teachers' opinion often challenge her view of a unitary self. During the inquiry, Beth began to question whether there is a way to meet everyone's agendas. "I keep thinking that I know what they need. Now I'm beginning to question why I think my

agenda is better. I rationalize by saying they don't know and school has always been this other way for them, but am I just imposing something else that isn't any better?"

As Joe tells it, the teacher "facilitates entrances through which students can make the bridge between what they know and do not know. Making connections helps them feel like insiders not always like novices." Too many teachers, in Joe's belief, make literature a passive thing. "We don't do anything with literature except tell kids to read this or that story, and we'll discuss it. We need to find ways to get them into conversations with what they're reading." Often, Joe reflected on his personal experience when considering the teacher's role. "Now my father made literature accessible and pleasurable. He'd dramatize scenes, laugh, question, and really pay attention to what I thought and what I liked. Why should it be different in schools?" The teacher needs to connect reading to writing. Joe emphasizes that the literature teacher should nurture the student as a writer. "The question isn't whether you're a literature teacher or a writing teacher. Study of literature is a starting point for writing, and writing is a starting point for understanding literature."

Joe began to recognize through continued inquiry that in many ways his role should be questioned more deeply. "As free and open as I've thought I am, I've misled myself. It's my agenda, my ways of learning literature, what I think that's important that gets put into place as rituals." As Joe continued to grapple with how he was coming to view himself, he began to see how recognizing contradictions opened spaces for the possibility of refining his understanding of the teacher's role. "I keep thinking that the students will get into my routines. Now, I'm wondering why I don't help them find their own ways in. Does it need to be drama, oral reading, and writing? I don't know. I can't quite imagine how to do that. That's the tricky part."

Jane sees the role of a teacher of literature tied integrally with developing student interests as life-long readers. Jane believes reading and literature are intertwined. She rejects the notions of reading groups or basal

programs. As Jane describes her belief in the teacher's role, nurturing students is central. Launching them. A teacher must have faith that students will develop interests in literature. "Constant immersion into literature. That's what worked for me. Always having literature around and central in my life and the lives of people I'd admired." As Jane sees it, readers are more excited in learning from one another, and they build on each other's ideas and reading experiences. When it is going well, we hear them saying, "I read something by him, too, and isn't he great, and you have to read this one if you liked that one. You're going to love this."

Jane examined the implications of her guidance. Some of her most compelling arguments for her classroom practice had underlying assumptions that she began to challenge. "For me, constant immersion was important. I love literature and while I blame myself when all my students don't, I think underneath I blame them. I value the students who are most like me." Jane expects students to share, to be excited, and to learn from one another. She has structures in place that can help make that happen. Jane came to understand that she was still in a position of privilege. In her final autobiographical reflections, she realized, "it isn't that I can make them me. I think underneath much of my nurturing, I'm trying to get them to be more like me. I need to question my strategies and priorities and how to help bring out who they are."

Through the inquiry, Beth, Jane, and Joe articulated a developing consciousness of the multiple positions, desires, and identities they negotiate. Confirming what Belsey (1990) has argued, individuals are "not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change" (p. 132). Teaching identity is influenced by a wide variety of factors. Working through multiple and contradictory facets of identity, Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's inquiries were complicated ones. They began to recognize the continuous reforming of identity. The dissonance this created led them to defensive reactions at times. Joe said, "I can't do everything. I don't have the imagination or energy." At

other times, they interpreted their experiences as contingent understandings. As Jane expressed it, "What I try at any given moment is the best that I can do then. I know that I'm open to change, that I invite it. I won't think or act in exactly the same way next year or the next. The changes are sometimes subtle."

The autobiographical inquiry was a way of keeping Jane's, Beth's, and Joe's thinking about teaching in process. They were able to distance themselves through narrative, not only to retell and recollect, but also to reconceptualize ways in which they interpret their underlying assumptions and practices. This inquiry encouraged them to view their teaching lives as dynamic, ever-changing, always responsive to contexts, events, and other people. These teachers, who have spent the better part of two decades in classrooms, have had many opportunities to formulate, reformulate, and test the consequences and implications of their beliefs and practices. Through this facet of their inquiry, they found an explicit medium to traverse the complex landscape of their multiple realities. They used their autobiographical accounts as *purposive agents* for learning how they view the constraints as well as the possibilities.

Teacher As Model

Jane, Joe, and Beth read to their students, share their own reading interests, describe current reading projects, and give students various degrees of responsibility for their own learning. Joe shows students how to "open conversations with the text," and Jane demonstrates her life-long passion for literature of diverse types. Beth models curiosity and a questioning attitude. Joe demonstrates how spoken and written language differ. Beth makes her reading processes explicit, and Jane discusses with students how she chooses a book. The participants utilize various methods to model and apply the idea of models in diverse ways, but for all, modeling enables the teacher to assist learning. As Joe stated, "I hadn't thought consciously about how often I model for students. It's more important than I realized in my teaching." But

just how interactive is the modeling?

The very attempt to empower students becomes something to be questioned by the teacher, as if liberation by the White Knight were necessary. At one level, Joe, Jane, and Beth began to see this as they studied the language of their discussion. Joe noted, "I hear 'teacher' and 'I' as if we are the only models of learners." Jane questioned whether modeling gives students a monotone way to approach literature. "Students might think of more if I weren't so strong in showing them, in setting the structures." Beth noted that this would require "rethinking, I'm just not sure. I see the benefits of being a model of a learner, but I have new questions." The three of them were stunned that they had begun to question something they believed in so completely. This is one example that underscores the importance of reading their teaching histories as texts.

Teacher As Writer

Jane began writing stories as she walked the woods outside Truckee, California. Beth was writing letters of apology and a family newspaper to "keep the extended family up on the gossip." Joe found fiction writing as a way to bridge "noticing and applying." The three believe that literature teachers need to be practicing writers, and each continues to explore the making of literature through writing. The poems that Jane writes for her granddaughters and students, the short stories that Joe shares with his writing group and classes, and the poems and personal narratives that Beth uses in class illustrate the importance of writing in their teaching lives.

Long before the research-and-practitioner literature was filled with dicta about the role of English teacher as writer, these teachers had established writing as a central part of their and their students' lives with literature. It is not difficult to state that the teacher of literature should be a practicing writer. To see three teachers acting in and through this belief is a very different thing. These teachers are reconceptualizing their histories with literature into classroom practices. As Carl Rogers (1969) notes, the

experiences of learners are often "self-discovered, self-appropriated" (p. 277). These teachers believe in the importance of using the strategies of their own learning with their students. Writing happens to be one strategy that the three share in common.

The difficulty is always one of creating the possibility for engaging in literature through writing but leaving the door open to other opportunities. Their inquiry on teacher as writer foregrounded the issue of whether or not emphasizing the strategies from their own learning might misappropriate strategies that students learn for themselves. Problematizing the issues of students' sense-making, these teachers began to ask whose interests they were serving. "Not all students want to do this writing," Joe suggested. "I've downplayed their concerns, thinking if they just hang in there and get some experience they'll love this." But students are multiple and positional. Joe, Beth, and Jane began to explore the complexities of their basic assumptions about writing and the reductiveness that may result from emphasizing one method that they believe in so firmly. Those students who like to write and write well are in a privileged position. They can work in ways that their teachers validate and value. The inquiry did not lead to answers, but it certainly raised questions about how to reconceptualize the importance of writing in the literature curriculum.

Teacher As Facilitator

Jane, Beth, and Joe articulated the essential role of literature teacher in ways very different from more common conceptions of literature teachers as those who transmit knowledge about specific texts, provide background information, give tests, or ask students to answer questions at the end of selections. They each value the teacher's role and believe that role is to "provide entrances and bridges between what they know and don't know," to "nudge, nurture, and prod," to make students active through questioning, thinking, connecting," and to "connect their interest and lives with what they choose to read." The teacher facilitates students' "initiation into experiences with literature," "finds

where students feel most comfortable and confident," and teaches them to think critically by "looking into literature." Given the differences in grade levels that they teach, Joe, Beth, and Jane express relatively consistent views on how learners learn literature. "The teacher can't teach literature to students, but can support and guide." This idea is echoed in Jane's statement, "I'm not sure we ever really teach literature." Or in Joe's query, "Don't they (students) find it for themselves? It's like the teacher guides and throws a few bones until they find one they like to chew." Beth asks a similar question: "Isn't there always a temptation to rush the process and just tell them? Is that learning? Or teaching?" Beth asks students "Why?"; Joe tells them, "Listen"; and Jane guides them "through choices." All agree that more learning takes place when students are personally engaged and encouraged to take a journey of discovery for themselves.

Finding ways to make literature relevant to students' lives and understanding the connectedness between their lives and what they read are cornerstones of Jane's, Beth's, and Joe's conceptual understanding of what it means to teach literature. Stepping back to analyze these statements, they began to see the profound challenge of balancing their beliefs and practices with students' agendas. For all the ways in which their statements ring true of what they might hope for their students, these teachers, in language and conception, were functioning as chief agents to the learning. Not that they were forgetting students entirely, but they began to recognize how strong their agendas were. They had to deal for themselves with Britzman's (1991) question, "What kinds of power and authority are taken up and not admitted?" (p. 17). Through problematizing their beliefs and practices, they struggled through another reexamination of their texts as teachers.

A Few Questions

How does autobiographical inquiry affect the participants' long-term conceptualizations and the sense they have of their multiple identities as teachers? How does autobiographical inquiry make explicit what might not

have been articulated before? Perhaps it is impossible to answer these questions, but in raising them, the complexity of Jane's, Beth's, and Joe's attempts to understand more about their teaching lives became obvious. They negotiated, questioned, and reconstructed how their practices may be constraining or exclusionary. They looked carefully at themselves, their motivations, and their actions. Perhaps autobiographical inquiry provided a way for them to articulate in propositional form what had been tacit. Finding dissonance among their beliefs, experiences, and practices allowed them to know more vividly, to tell more clearly, and to associate more strongly with the dynamics of their teaching lives.

In this way, autobiographical inquiry may be employed as a learning tool to facilitate teachers' understanding of the various contexts that influence their motivations and intentions in classrooms. We came to recognize such inquiry as essentially a method through which these teachers could map the terrain of their teaching histories. I have detailed a few of these issues that seemed interesting as well as problematic. Each will require further inquiry and analysis by Jane, Joe, and Beth as they continue to compose their teaching lives. Certainly their inquiry demonstrates how many long-running practices in the teaching of literature must be questioned if not contested, how many admirable intentions and goals must be unpacked for critique as well as possibility.

Curriculum Inquiry

Curriculum in literature education is another discourse of perpetuation and protectionism that needs interrogation. Clearly authority, power, and values have long been matters of concern in curriculum planning and implementation. Much of Joe's, Jane's, and Beth's inquiry focused on their struggles to define their conceptions and constructions of curriculum, often confronting departmental, administrative, or district agendas. Highlighting knowledge hierarchies, values, and emphases of control, their inquiry led them to consider how literature curriculum involved more than determining which

textbooks, skills, subjects, or learning methods they would incorporate. What these teachers have in common is their awareness of the need to critically reflect on the implications of curricular theory and practices and so to revise their practice-based theorizing. Although curriculum has traditionally been defined as a linear program, as a means to an end, more recent theorists consider it a construction reflecting ideological and theoretical stances, a process of learning to make meaning from ideas and experiences that "rests on teacher judgment, rather than teacher direction" (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 96). Conceptions of curriculum have direct ties to and important consequences for what happens in classrooms and how it is viewed. To understand the implications of these conceptions, as they translate into teachers' views of curriculum, the key concepts associated with the two very different orientations need to be discussed as a backdrop to Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's explorations of what curriculum is and means.

"A curriculum," as Stake (1967) describes it, "is an educational program" (p. 32). A program includes content, methods, and intended outcomes. "Usually there are messages to be conveyed, relationships to be demonstrated, concepts to be symbolized, understandings and skills to be acquired" (p. 32). All are characteristically scoped and sequenced into teachable parts. Curriculum as program demonstrates a narrow if not myopic belief in curriculum as the stuff of education, which is uniformly and neatly packaged, and doled out to the masses. Curriculum, viewed in this way, is knowledge transmission. The best educated students take away the most stuff.

But as Ken Kantor (1990) suggests, "curriculum needs to be defined in terms of personal, lived experiences, rather than through some set of objectives, strategies, notions of scope and sequence, and artificial scenarios" (p. 71). Reconceptualizing curriculum has led to diverse ways of interrogating its representations. Alternative theories focus on different purposes and practices of curriculum. These include development of the self as learner, emphasis on process over product, impact of societal forces, and democratization of schools. Constructions of theories and models for

curriculum are ideologically based. Behind each lurks a variety of constructed *isms* that have not been made explicit. What we are trying to understand is how any of these *isms*--rationalism, romanticism, feminism, racism, authoritarianism--define or explain teachers' understanding of their work. By stepping outside the classroom texts they have created and inquiring into their guiding principles and beliefs about curriculum, teachers might find such inquiry a means for teasing out the challenges and possibilities of curriculum composing. For, "teaching itself is a constantly evolving form of curriculum, a particular way of interacting, interpreting, questioning, and re-visioning" (Miller, 1990, p. 86).

We do not often examine the notion of curriculum as composing or curriculum as belief. These views of curriculum are beset with subjectivity and challenge the complacency of accepting curriculum as program. Walking into a school as a new teacher, one is likely to find that the first things placed on the desk are a grade and lesson-plan book, the curriculum guide, and a stapler. Those guides are mostly filled with what students should *know about.* These are usually a collected version of truisms from multiple, competing, and often contradictory sources that represent a motley array of traditions, innovations, desires, and beliefs. Of course, there is seldom time to teach all the *know abouts* that the guides include. They are the product of a labor Sisyphean in its arduousness and essential mindlessness. In order to resist the temptation of accepting the view of curriculum as program, we must recognize something useful and understandable in its place. To engage in a circumspect exploration could lead to a further understanding of curriculum that might inform choice and decision making.

Literature Curriculum As Ideology

One representation of literature reflects traditional assumptions about literature as program and knowledge. Texts, the canon, literary criticism, identification of elements, and understanding of conventions constitute the curriculum. Other representations reflect more personal, social, political, or

cultural conceptions of curriculum. These multiple representations of literature curriculum exemplify the polemical multiplicities housed in our conceptions of curricular content and purposes. As Bill Green (1990) suggests, the result of these differences is "an endemic feature of English teaching right from the outset: its internal history of conflict and struggle, and secondly, its role in the (re)production of larger, more systematic forms of social difference, discrimination and domination" (p. 136).

The particular evolutions of ideology in literature curriculum go beyond the dichotomy between Dixon's (1967) "personal growth" model and the "cultural heritage" model, beyond the view of "what the authorities call literature" (Hirsch, 1975, p. 206), and beyond reader response, transaction, or subjective criticism. What is beyond is blurred by unclarified issues and stakeholders, but the inquiry cannot be sidestepped. It does not seem that redressing any *ism*--utilitarianism, professionalism, multiculturalism, or egocentrism--in new robes will help. I am not even certain that we know what we are looking for--progressivism, evangelism, feminism, or cultural pluralism--let alone whether we will recognize it when we see it. However, a way of beginning to see what literature curriculum means and the complexities in composing it is to ask the teachers of literature to explain and examine their conceptions and constructions.

With these issues in mind, Joe, Beth, and Jane detailed their beliefs, considered their processes for composing literature curriculum, and described, whenever possible, the constraints and freedoms that guide their decision making. The inquiry led them into a maze of tensions and dilemmas. They described how their reading, theorizing, and teaching informed their beliefs about curriculum. They examined how workshops, curriculum guides, and administrative and peer support or antagonism inform their curriculum implementation. We revisited circuitous pathways littered with how-to gimmicks, sure-fire success strategies, each packaged in glitzy basals or literature anthologies. Each questioned whether and in what ways curriculum planning was productive rather than reproductive. As Joe tells it, "A

committee generally gets together and talks about what ought to happen. That 'ought' is skills, texts, and sequences that a group of teachers agree upon. We need to ask more questions." Beth described how Michael Apple (1985) informed her view of the power of curriculum to suppress, change, or mindlessly reproduce what is. "I came across Apple's books after reading an *English Education* article that dealt implicitly with curriculum. I started reading and thought about how I'd taken curriculum for granted." Beth goes on to describe that while she had not followed district curriculum guides herself, she "hadn't realized the power of reproduction within them."

Jane described her dissatisfaction with goals and objectives in curriculum guides. "I couldn't understand the purposes behind those lofty statements. I need a big picture, a way of seeing what, how, and why together." For Jane, curriculum guides do not help her resee herself or her work. "I do that better through my reading. For example, Glenna Sloan's book, *The Child As Critic,* challenged me to look at myself as a teacher." Joe points out that his reading about teaching continues to force him to rethink his understandings of curriculum. "Some books help me find language through which I explore ideas. The books don't teach me. I'm thinking about my reading of the Corcoran (1987) book, *Reader, Texts, Teachers.* I found a language there for what I'd been struggling to articulate about teaching or experiencing literature." For Joe, that new language was reader response and transaction.

By examining Joe's, Jane's, and Beth's beliefs about literature curriculum and digging around in the roots of their ideological assumptions, we worked towards articulating the frameworks through which they compose their curriculum. The following record of their inquiry demonstrates that curriculum is more for them than classroom strategies, content, or sequencing. It is more than different methods for facilitating students' thinking, responding, or negotiating of curriculum. Rather, it comes down to deciding what literature literacy means, to whom, how, and why, before determining how to facilitate those conceptions into practice. Rather than viewing

curriculum as what is to be taught, they emphasized what learning literature means to students. Figure 1 lists the principles that received emphasis in each of their articulations of literature curriculum.

Beth stresses that students learn literature by • investigating issues and problems • negotiating and renegotiating meaning personally and socially • involving themselves actively rather than passively • rehearsing ideas, making connections, exploring relationships • reflecting deliberately and carefully on what has been learned and on what can be or needs to be learned • taking present knowledge and applying it to new situations • consolidating learning through application in performances, celebrations, or writing • trying out ideas and testing opinions • reflecting on what has been learned
Joe believes students learn literature when they are actively involved in • puzzling through, sorting out, investigating • feeling empowered to have opinions, attitudes, beliefs • interacting and collaborating with others' thinking, writing, and reading • inquiring, questioning, testing hypotheses, and reflecting • interpreting and applying knowledge • constructing their own meanings • performing their meanings for themselves and others
Jane emphasizes that students learn best when • working with intention, motivation, and judgment • designing, planning, and setting goals for what is to be learned • discovering and using strategies to further understand • receiving instruction when it is needed • reflecting on what has been learned and what can or needs to be learned • defining and constructing their curriculum • setting new goals for solving problems, answering questions, and finding new information

Figure 1. Principles of Curriculum Planning

As their inquiry continued, Jane suggested that her questions about literature curriculum have changed over her years of teaching. Joe asked for examples. She replied, "I'm not concerned as much with what is going on as

how it goes on." Beth suggested that they list questions that were important in planning curriculum. In a nearly fifty-minute discussion they composed their central questions and categorized them into four phases (see Figure 2).

Phase I--Content
Are there certain literary selections all students should read? Is there knowledge about literature that readers should understand? Do readers need to know conventions? What is the readers' role in selecting texts? How much information do students need about authors? Are literary terms important to know?
Phase II--Purposes of Literature Education
What does learning mean, and to whom? Does early literature experience have the deciding influence on students' attitudes toward reading or studying literature? Why study or learn literature? Is it essential to study literature rather than just enjoy reading? Is the entertainment, enjoyment, and nurturing of life-long readers the ultimate aim of literature education?
Phase III--Contexts for Learning Literature
What are the conditions that nurture learning literature? What obligations do we have to develop cultural literacy, and whose literacy do we validate? Can curriculum guides that are static serve the needs of groups that are dynamic? How can students develop a class community that is supportive and open to diverse ideas? How can teachers organize their classrooms to promote open exchanges without the teacher as center?
Phase IV--Ways and Means of Learning
How can a teacher preserve yet extend individual interpretation? How do we learn literature? Do we learn processes for reading literature? Do certain activities promote learning literature? Does meaning reside in the text, in the reader's experiences, or in both? How can literature learning be evaluated? Are there sequences that promote learning literature? Are there literary concepts that promote understanding? How does writing nurture reading?

Figure 2. Critical Questions in Learning Literature

As Beth suggests, "It's possible to look at these questions as more than types of questions. I spend much more time thinking about Phases III and IV at this point in my career. I probably spent more time on Phases I and II in earlier years when I focused on what and why."

It is impossible to determine individual contributions to this list of questions. This collaborative enterprise illuminates how teachers might work together to reconstruct their present knowledge of curricular issues rather than collaborate on what texts, skills, or sequences should be taught. Joe summed it up this way: "I came to think explicitly that curriculum is not a course of study or your favorite English literature anthology or Hirsch-like lists. It's questions that can be translated into practices." According to Beth, "Curriculum is not a sequence of skills or content. It certainly isn't a textbook. It's the experiences that students generate into new meaning that bring about a new way of feeling or hearing or seeing." For Jane, "Curriculum isn't replicating or giving back someone else's knowledge. Curriculum is the children and what they make of their learning. It isn't what we teach that needs to be planned. It's stepping to the other side and thinking about what children learn."

Constraints on Curriculum Composing: Gatekeepers, Guardians, Jailers, and Judges

Through their discussions, Beth, Jane, and Joe developed ways to articulate what they experienced, read, and practiced. Implicit in their curriculum inquiry were the tensions of determining the connectedness between their questions on curriculum and their assumptions about students, teachers, content, and strategies in learning literature. The composing of literature curriculum involves more than the individual belief systems, interests, or whims of the persons charged with planning and implementing that curriculum. What we came to recognize through this inquiry are the implicit ideological and political assumptions that guide what is taught, required, or recommended. Beth, Jane, and Joe were consciously aware of this watchdog

attitude and its effects.

Anyone who has been involved or stood on the sidelines of a censorship hearing, with its array of accusations, temper tantrums, and calls to strike down the sinners, knows that such confrontations sap energy and enthusiasm from teachers. For Jane, Joe, and Beth, that image was all too real after a list of novels, anthologies, and classroom activities in their district had been subject to particularly close scrutiny within the past year, including a suit filed against a teacher who did not see the signs of a young boy's suicidal tendencies in his journal writing.

Censorship was one of many issues that these teachers noted as a force that has the potential to affect their curricular decisions. Not all were negative influences. At times, these teachers were nurtured and encouraged by students, peers, administrators, or parents. There were gatekeepers who opened doors to new knowledge or asked probing questions that helped them reconsider their work. Others barred doors. To show the range and complexity of these influences, following is a thematized summary of Joe's, Beth's, and Jane's explanations of how these issues shape and continue to play a role in their curriculum composition. An examination of these themes made it all the more obvious that only part of curriculum planning is dependent on teachers, no matter the thoughtfulness, inventiveness, or desire of their intentions. Curriculum planning is a complex series of negotiations among multiple influences and competing forces. I came to appreciate the capacity of these teachers to continually improvise in order to respond to these influences on a day-to-day basis in the immediate setting of their classrooms. Their discussion is a reminder that questions of what curriculum is cannot be separated from questions about the process of curriculum composing.

Relationships with Students

"Some classes just handle the freedom better than others." Joe had been discussing how his reading workshop offers students a wide range of options in reading and writing literature. "Basically I set out a framework with so

many poems, so many stories. You need to do at least two things--writing, performances, research in groups or individually." As Joe describes it, some classes take over the intention with commitment, and others "require a constant supervision and monitoring. They make it difficult and I end up wishing we'd wrap up and get on to something else."

Contextual factors--whether group dynamics, particular combinations of students, certain times of the day or year--challenge and change teachers' intentions. According to Joe, "Sometimes we just stop and talk it out: Do you want to go on with this? Why isn't it working? We step back and restructure before we go on." He is willing to revise curriculum as it develops with different groups. "There are times you have twenty-five out of thirty-two kids who have jobs, working until 2:00 a.m., and they're not fit for much of anything when the bell rings at 8:20 a.m." Joe expresses his concern about his high-schoolers' life outside school. "They work; they watch TV; several of the girls are pregnant. So much of school isn't meaningful. I try to keep in touch, to listen, to probe and prod them into linking literature with their lives. I keep revising the curriculum as we go and try to get attuned to their needs." Joe's discussion reveals the uncertainties that come in dealing with these volatile and quixotic adolescents. Curriculum plans that he makes or that are negotiated with students have tenuous connections with the students' interest on any given day. Joe is not alone in his concern. Beth points out that "you just don't know if they've had breakfast, or if one of them just learned that there's an upcoming divorce at home, or a best friend's having a problem."

Beth learns to "read" the students. "We adjust accordingly because they do let me know; that's one of the first things we work at from the beginning. But they're not always quick to do it." The other problem is that seldom are thirty-five students in the same mood at the same time or interested in precisely the same things. Beth is sensitive to group dynamics and interests, and she adjusts her intentions accordingly. "There are days though," Jane reflects, "when something sets the group on edge and no matter how interested or involved they've been, they just can't get on track." Jane

remedies this by getting a pulse on the mood and picking up from there. "Whatever accounts for it, I've learned to go with the rhythms. I know it doesn't sound like I'm structured, but we have routines that establish a rhythm. That helps work against the separate and individual moods. But some days . . . ."

After pointing out these situational constraints on curriculum, Joe shrugged and stared off momentarily before saying, "Curriculum planning isn't mindlessness or sheer habit, and it isn't written in stone. The teacher must think on his feet." Joe indicates there is no certainty except in knowing the uncertainty of how any student, for whatever reasons, may have needs or an agenda distinct from the plan for the day. "They sense our moods," Beth states, then asks, "How do we get beyond that? Sometimes, I mean, it's hard to be on top of everything. I'm always conscious because they notice." The effort to clarify the problem of relationships with students represents an ongoing negotiation that requires teachers and students to readjust, reframe, and reconstruct the intellectual and social environment. That demand is taxing on teachers and students as they consider possible consequences of alternative courses of action.

Critical to understanding this complexity, Joe suggests, is that teachers learn to stand outside of themselves. "I need to know more about how students experience what we do together." This is necessary if the process is to be dynamic and reflective. As Beth sums it up, "If curriculum is to mean anything, it must be a shared meaning between students and teacher and anything that works against that won't ultimately work." Beth's perspective is influenced by years of practice that have demonstrated this principle, and her belief seems directly related to one of her principles of learning, that it is "a process of negotiating and renegotiating meaning." Jane sums it up this way: "By recognizing what's going on and that sometimes it occurs in patterns--like every Friday afternoon, when James and Robert are together, or rainy days without recess--I can find ways to compensate or neutralize those dynamics." In their separate ways, each restates the importance of the

students' role in curriculum.

Time

On the other hand, all this takes time. Time is a central consideration in the planning. Joe creates large blocks of workshop time for students to read, write, work, and talk together. He is at his best then. "The best part obviously is the workshop part. Where they're playing with it, where there's time for them to work it out, and time for me to clown around, make suggestions, listen to what they have to say and encourage them. That's the ultimate teaching." Joe notes that this requires a time commitment on the part of the teacher. He intimates that the teacher must try using time differently. Joe still fights the fifty-minute blocks from bell to bell. "It's like the bell steals time away. When students work through the bell and not to it, I know they're engaged." His reflections capture the dilemma of who controls time and who determines how time is used. Control over time is power. Whether the timetable is set by a teacher, students, an assembly, or bell is not always within the teacher's control.

Beth controls time at the beginning of class as students get organized and focused. She believes that the disruption of moving from room to room, hour by hour, nearly whiplashed, from one subject to the next, must be offset as a class session begins. Beth gets things started and arranged and begins a "sequence or a rehearsal," then begins "moving back once students begin to take control of the time." Beth senses when to begin letting go by noting "their gestures, involvement in discussion. There's an energy in the class and I can just tell." Beth's identification of this pattern in her control of time led her to analyze how this might influence students' involvement. "Maybe they know they don't really need to engage immediately, or maybe they can't until they've adjusted in. It's hard to read that. It could be worth playing around with." Beth has raised a question about the locus of control. Within the context of schools, where students move from class to class, her method of adapting to the school environment is part of her unwritten curriculum. As

with many other teachers, Beth questions, compromises, and accommodates, but through this inquiry she has raised a particularized question about how her control over time influences students' involvement. Much of what her inquiry demonstrates is that teaching literature is neither technical nor easily generalizable.

Jane represents time in elementary school in fluid blocks where "the reading and writing blocks are extensive periods of time in our day. Other subjects naturally fit into those, and we have some time set aside." Jane does rough out a schedule, and "we mostly keep to that, but there is great flexibility depending on the involvement level. They need that overall structure." Without the constraints of fifty-minute blocks (although time for PE, music, and library are scheduled) Jane has much more freedom to control time than either Beth or Joe. In her classroom, students have extended periods for projects, independent research, free reading, or talking about the progress of their work. After listening to Beth's and Joe's comments on time constraints, she noted how her approaches and choices depended on the "freedom to extend or cut-short a block of time. The children and I can choose as long as I don't feel confined by some sense of obligation to cover everything that we'd sketched out for the day. I usually start the day by negotiating a rough agenda with students. We adjust that, but it sets a framework. I'm just learning to negotiate this effectively with students." For Jane, the school day is dynamic, changing, and constantly open for review and renegotiation. This can happen only as long as she does not allow imposed beliefs about what she should cover to interfere with what she and her students choose to accomplish.

Composing the curriculum is much more than deciding upon concepts, content, and skills. Time is relational. Each teacher's vision of how to structure time is constrained and made possible by the potential to characterize agendas and priorities in the idiosyncratic and unique contexts of particularized classroom environments. If we suppose that teachers do not take a critical stance toward curriculum representations, these three teachers

demonstrate otherwise. Of course, teaching is always an act of hope. These teachers, then, dream and plan and evaluate the day-to-day possibilities of doing more than their job within the time frames regulated by the school day.

Mental and Physical Energy

As Joe wiped a smudge from his glasses, he finished this thought: "Thinking about teaching preoccupies my dreams, my away-from-school time, even my golf game. I get brain tired." As Beth notes, "I read teaching into almost everything I do. I look at situations, at what I read, at ways of questioning. I look at most everything through the lens of how I'd use it in the classroom." Beth looked tired just saying it. Jane describes a common feeling: "I understand a bit more clearly why I struggle with this whole idea of teaching. I kept thinking I was the only one who worried, wondered, and otherwise fretted about what happens to students in classroom." She elaborates, "We just don't know enough. That's what makes teaching so tiring. I figured other teachers knew more, and I was alone with all the work." Picking up a stack of student writing, getting ready to end the long day, Joe reflects, "Society changes, I change, and the kids change. I want to think of theory in a much more active way than we have before. It must be contextualized in practice and not in another theory from someone with an outsider's view. People don't know. Teaching is thinking. It's tough work."

How easy it is for someone away from a public school classroom to tell teachers that they should develop their theories, read more, prepare better or differently. The truth for Beth is that "I keep moving and adjusting my theories nearly every day I teach. I'm figuring out that it will always be like this. I read something new about teaching or something absolutely doesn't work that worked before." Beth looked even more tired. This idea of continuous theorizing rather than theory was central to Beth's thinking. "I have temporary theories," she says. It comes down to accepting change as a condition of teaching. Change that occurs yearly, daily, and even by the minute and second. The whole idea of theorizing rather than theory is an

important distinction when we consider the processes rather than the product of curriculum. In the sense that Beth describes it, and as Schön (1983, 1987) has demonstrated, theorizing is dynamic. Beth's description of her work represents reflecting in and on action rather than accepting theory in the static conception of the technical rationalist tradition.

This discussion ended with reflections upon how personal knowledge about teaching is developed and expanded when teachers create opportunities to think more deeply about their work. Beth, Jane, and Joe helped me to recognize and remember how important it is to talk with other teachers, and yet how little time and energy are left at the end of the school day for this important work. The most taken-for-granted assumptions of curriculum can be challenged in expressions of larger purposes and overarching values. It is hard to enter such discussion alone, behind the closed door of our individual classrooms. Opening spaces within the validated structure of the school day will prove necessary if the important work of challenging our beliefs and labor is to be done.

Evangelism: Theorizing on Tyrannizing

As Beth, Joe, and Jane talked through the dilemmas of their curriculum work, I was struck by how each of the three, in one form or another, made reference to the near tyranny that some of the educational literature imposes. Joe described a Manichaean dichotomy: the Billy Graham evangelistic fervor of the self-styled progressives versus the staid mainliners who are well fed on their rituals, myths, and steadfast belief that they are teaching the important doctrine. Joe described scenes from his faculty room talk. "I think about two or three mornings a week the zealots are out in full force arguing mostly in platitudes against the platitudes of other camps." The problem is, as Joe describes it, "they're not doing serious thinking or talking about how their experiences yesterday inform them today." From study guides, worksheets, and crossword puzzles, to Nancy Atwell's reading and writing workshop, "everyone is feeling smug and self-satisfied that they are with the saved."

Teaching is hard work and requires thoughtfulness about how and what is to be learned. The complexities cannot be made into formulas for what is right or wrong. Yet, as Joe pointed out, some teachers who are espousing workshop approaches and reader response may tyrannize students in other ways. "If you read what writers say about their work, you learn that some work in solitude, do not share their writing, or work in idiosyncratic ways with various rhythms and different tools. The minute we make another formula for the way it ought to be, we're not paying attention to the students." A workshop can lack sensitivity to students' needs in much the same way as the teacher equipped with three-hundred pages of study questions for *Moby Dick.* Joe argues that he has been working his way by theorizing as he goes. He reads widely--Elbow, Applebee, Bruner, Giroux, Schön, Goodlad, Rosenblatt, fiction and poetry, and contemporary nonfiction. He has equipped himself with conceptual tools and teaching perspectives. "But, lacking right answers, I intend to keep reading and examining what we do each day in class." Joe points out the important dimension of continuously reading his classroom as a text. "It's vigilance in analyzing the present situation rather than evangelism that will get us nearer where we want to go. Dichotomizing doesn't work."

Beth believes these party-line stories have permeated the professional literature. Stories of teachers reflecting on their teaching, on particular students, or on methods they have tried, may offer easy and formulaic ways of seeing classrooms. "Many are party-line stories. Where are the uncertainties, the unresolved rather than the success stories? I'd like to see more uncertainty, more struggles with the questions that haven't been resolved." Through this discussion, Beth intimated that it does not matter much which crusade the teacher is on. Each one is reductive. Becoming good at imitating a belief, a style, or a language of belief is performing someone else's show. Seeking approval from vocal peers and emulated experts, the converted pass along their rhetoric, models, and mindlessness. Now, despite all this, there is good talk going on--arguments, discussions, floundering, uncertainties--when we listen to one another, question one

another, without individual agendas getting in the way of the talking and listening. How can we expect to do for students that which we cannot do for each other?

Jane suggests, "You can't make an idea for someone else, like the whole language club. Yes, they're mostly ideas I believe in, but those came from within me and from my work with children. I can nod approval, but I don't want to idealize or package the ideas. It's too easy for teachers to just follow after others." Coming out of these discussions was an idea that teachers need not only to discover but also to recover their own reason. Mindlessness takes many forms, not the least of which may be to join the congregation of the saved. Order is an intoxicating noun. To order, by necessity, a reductive verb form. As Jane, Joe, and Beth demonstrate through the rich texture of their curriculum inquiry, part of the process of composing is to develop dispositions of mind which allow teachers to confirm, to modify, or to extend the classroom and the work to be done there. There are multitudinous ways to create the composition.

What I am suggesting is threefold. First, what we do in classrooms, behind those often closed doors, is what composes us as teachers and proves what we are, at least momentarily, no matter how we try to draw ourselves through our rhetoric and public presentations. Second, the consequences of our preoccupation with finding set answers or of aligning ourselves with ideological, pedagogical, or philosophical camps may lead us to lose ourselves further to the rhetoric of false certainty, rather than find ourselves through the questions and tensions. Third, a more sympathetic understanding of the uncertainties and hard work of teaching are needed, along with a clearer understanding of what we can contribute as individuals to the enterprise of teaching.

Pedagogical Inquiry

Throughout my career as a student, I had no idea that teachers planned what went on in classrooms. The idea was simple: they came to class and so did I. Whatever happened in the time we spent in that room together was what happened in classrooms everywhere. I assumed that teachers drove their '56 Chevys from some white-picket-fenced houses to the school parking lot, walked the long corridor to the teachers' lounge where they sipped coffee and caught up on the latest gossip about "little Jimmie Anderson's mother's latest affair," or cooed over teachers' pet Sarah Provost's latest blue ribbon at the City Music Festival. Then, they arrived in the classroom as the last bell rang. Whatever was written in the teaching book to whatever was done in those classrooms, where nearly a century of teaching had gone on--was what teaching was and always would be. Literature was one of the subjects taught in English. I expected that. Day-to-day life in English classrooms fashioned my belief that some printing press of the universe spewed out page after page for anthologies. It was taken for granted that teachers did not have much to do with this except to assign the pages that should be read, ask a few questions, and give a test and a grade on a report card. I do not remember much of what happened day to day. Blurred images remain.

Of course my personal image is one that seems to go well beyond me. Robert Everhart (1983), in his study of junior high boys, points out that they see the "teacher's world . . . straightforward and linear, hardly complex at all" (p. 74). Dan Lortie's study (1975) provides further evidence of the same. This image was trapped in my mind, even through secondary methods courses, until I started to teach literature. Doing so, what was conceived as a given became problematic. What was to happen each day needed to be constructed. To those constructions I would bring my knowledge of literature, of pedagogy, of school culture, of what was going on in the heads in the sea of faces before me, and of how I could act into meaning all of these understandings day after day, hour after hour for twenty-three years. Knowing well how difficult it is to articulate or to represent what happens in the classroom, how difficult to

understand or to explain the complex thinking and planning behind what happens, I feel especially responsible to adequately represent and interpret Beth's, Joe's, and Jane's accounts, and not to do again what I did as a student in school where I took too much for granted.

Learning to Read beyond Our Assumptions

However simplistically they may be viewed, events that take place in the classroom are a complex series of situations and negotiations. As Beth tells it, "So much happens in each class hour that I can't predict completely. Some things happen the way I anticipate they will; some don't. It's always indefinite, and I have to be prepared to think on my feet." Each day is an adventure and a journey to act into meaning what these teachers believe about teaching and learning literature. Central to these journeys are images of what takes place in their classrooms as well as the interpretations of intentions behind the events. The dialogic qualities of *what, how,* and *why* mediate knowing, believing, and becoming into classroom events. There is, behind every classroom experience, an implicit conversation with knowledge, understanding, experience, and belief about the nature of learning literature. The following scenarios describe real classroom events and my readings of them. For the reader, these narrative reconstructions open the walls of Beth's, Joe's, and Jane's classrooms and allow you to step into the work that goes on there. The commentaries that follow each narrative examine the literature lessons that I observed and demonstrate how these lessons send implicit, if not overt and explicit, messages to students about ways of reading literature.

Reading Literature Lessons

The following vignettes are presented as a way of bringing the reader into Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's classrooms in juxtaposition with what has been learned about their purposes and constructions of curriculum composing. The commentary which follows each narrative is intended to clarify concepts and

themes related to each participant's constructed reality of teaching literature.

Lesson 1. Questioning Texts
[7:40 a.m., February 14, 1991]

Susan Parker is face to face with Craig Leverett when she asks this question: "Do you think the narrator is Cheyenne?" Craig shrugs his shoulders upward toward his ears as he asks, "Does it matter whether he is or not? How would it change the story either way?" Susan and Craig are discussing an excerpt from Thomas Berger's (1974) *Little Big Man.* It is Susan's turn: "How would you join a tribe other than being born into it? If you joined, wouldn't you always be an outsider?" "Or," Craig turns pages until he finds the place, "could it be . . . like this is his way of saying he was an outsider? Why does he say that the guys with him were suspicious of him being in the first ranks? Is his ability to be a good warrior the question?" They are leaning into the pages together. So far they have read several sentences at least three times. These ninth graders in Beth's class show their stick-to-itiveness for several more minutes. "Wait," Susan slaps Craig's arm. "Wasn't there another place where he said something like that too?" She reads, "It was the first notice he had paid me in a long time" [Berger, p. 36]. Craig responds, "Why does it really matter? He said he's pretending to be an Indian. Does that mean he's having a hard time living in his culture or that he is an outsider?" Susan pauses before asking, "If you were in that situation wouldn't you be critical of the tribe's weakness against the strength of the cavalry?" Craig responds, "But don't you have loyalty to your own people even when they aren't going to come out on top?" Susan asks, "Isn't that a very necessary part of Indian belief?"

Beth is in the far corner of the room in a similar conversation with her partner. She glances at her watch before saying, "How did this way of discussing through questions change how you normally discuss stories?" Hands rise toward the ceiling.

Jim: It makes you look harder for your questions.

Jen: I listen more carefully to what my partner asks than I do when someone just expresses an opinion.

Craig: I didn't feel pushed to come up with an answer. I got to hold back definite answers.

Sue: I got nervous. I kept wanting to give answers or get answers. It's too indefinite.

Brian: I have things I want to go back and figure out now . . . because of the questions.

Beth summarizes. "So, some of you are saying that when we carry on a conversation in questions you're finding a path through the story. Reread the story tonight and notice if you read it differently now that you've spent time asking these questions." The bell rings. Students rearrange desks and organize their stacks of books before heading for the door and to their next class.*

Let us begin by looking at students' moves: Students form a partnership, have a shared text, begin discussion with a question, respond with a series of additional questions, ask questions, reread passages from the text to carry forward the construction of meaning, reflect on the experience, then reread the text noting how the question and dialogue session frames their reading. Consider the teacher moves: Beth models the dialogue through questions with students for two consecutive days prior to the session narrated here, becomes a partner if numbers are not equal, facilitates a meta-conversation, summarizes, then extends the lesson's purpose into an assignment. If what has taken place is a reading lesson, what has been learned?

Beth introduces the idea that questioning a text in multiple ways facilitates the construction of meaning. The lesson demonstrates the importance of tentativeness in forming opinions and exploring options as students rehearse possible readings through their questions. By conducting a discussion through questions, the students are led as readers, as they describe it, to "listen more carefully," to "hold back definite answers," and to "have things to go back and figure out." The primary purpose of the lesson is to make explicit a number of reader moves: readers question text without immediately looking for answers, pose alternative ways of reading, reread,

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*All descriptions of classroom events are reconstructed from the author's field notes and audio tapes of Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's classes. Students are referred to here by pseudonyms.

take time to rehearse readings, and discuss ways of reading. Beth's reading lesson helps to confront Sue's expectations of literature discussions: "I kept wanting to give answers or to get answers."

Behind this class session were two days of preparation in which Beth worked closely with students and assisted them in learning to ask questions. During this time they worked from a shared text, categorized the types of questions they typically ask, and stretched themselves to ask more questions. Following the line of questions in Susan and Craig's dialogue demonstrates the richness of their exploration. They question the narrator's motivations, his status, and his authenticity. They ask how their prior questions connect to a series of questions about how they would behave or about the expected behavior of a particular cultural group. There were literal-level questions that students asked one another: "Where did this take place? Do we ever know the name of the narrator? Who won the battle?" But the questions these students asked were also about reactions, author's intentions, connections with literature or personal experience, connotations, interpretations, and evaluation.

Through this reading lesson, Beth makes explicit at least two reading strategies: questioning texts and constructing meaning. The meta-conversation makes these two strategies explicit as the following excerpt from one of the practice sessions demonstrates:

Beth: One of the things that I noticed when Nate and Dan did this last series of questions was how many times they reread. Any thoughts about why you do that or how it is important?

Rosie: Well, it's like when you read something a second or third time. New ideas sort of pop out. I reread to get ideas for the questions.

Andy: The words change after you get the questions going. I notice details I didn't see before the questions were asked, things I'd sort of skipped over before.

Jamie: Gradually the words sort of come into focus.

Stewart: Yeah, you want to get the new facts in mind before asking the next question.

Beth: Are they facts?

Stewart: Yeah, well no--instead I'd say--well there isn't a word for it other than facts.

Colin: Like new ideas?

Jeremy: Okay, maybe it's been explained by the questioning and then it means more.

In this particular exchange, students demonstrate that knowledge is not fixed; it is created. They formulate and speculate on how their strategies inform their readings: "New ideas pop out"; "I notice details I didn't see before"; "It's explained by the questioning." Students share a series of conjectures about the purposes behind these strategies. When Beth's participation in the exchange is examined, she guides the students' explorations, but they have the responsibility for carrying the discussion forward. They talk to one another and do not funnel all information through Beth. Beth monitors her desire to initiate a discussion that opens up rather than closes opportunities for students to wrestle with ideas in the text and with their ways of making sense of what they read.

Beth makes the suggestion that "kids come up with things that never occur to me. If I listen it actually gives me a better understanding of how they work, how what I try to facilitate helps or hinders them, and what they need to do when they get stuck." In discussing her own understanding of how these lessons unfold, Beth referred to her habit of "explaining things to herself, of questioning herself when she reads." Taking into account her ways of engaging with text, Beth discovers ways to encourage her students to do the same. As Beth suggested, "The trouble is, I don't always know where to look." Saying this is not enough for her, and she remains concerned with finding ways to promote active and activating reading lessons that go beyond what is in a particular text. For students to understand reading strategies presupposes

their having developed awareness of how to read in multiple ways. Beth tries to objectify her knowledge of this through the reading lessons that are acted into meaning in her classroom. The classroom becomes a philosophic laboratory where "forming, thinking, knowing, abstracting, meaning-making, acting, creating, learning, interpreting: Imagination names them all" (Berthoff, 1984, p. *x*).

Obviously this lesson could be read in multiple ways. For example, none of the students' questions were probed on the day I observed. In following each other through a series of questions, these students avoided building a community meaning, set aside an affective reading, and questioned in specifics more than generalizations. This is to suggest that various readings of the lesson are context dependent, bound by when and how the lesson is read and by whom. Observing this one lesson without knowing about the preparatory work and explanations given in previous days, about Beth's intent in teaching this strategy, or about how she follows through with the strategy in subsequent days and discussions, would render very different readings. It became clear to me as a researcher that the interpretations given to events, attitudes, and settings are interpretations of choice and require careful crafting and consciousness. There is no surefire and right reading of any of these lessons. My depictions of what I saw and heard are as much my story of the experience as they are the reporting of the participants' experiences.

By developing a classroom experience that engaged students in investigations of meaning, in active questioning of the texts, and in reflections on what they were doing, Beth acts into meaning many of her principles as listed in Figure 1. Beth's practices are best understood against the backdrop of her stated purposes for literature education, "where they can learn to actively question and get at meaning for themselves." Her image of the role of teacher "as a model really of the questioning attitude," and her emphasis on curriculum that "leads students to generate new meaning" are evidenced in the lesson. Even though Beth states that she encounters many difficulties in determining what and how to teach, she takes seriously her responsibility

to reflect on her practice, to remain alert to ways in which she can further her beliefs in practice, and to monitor the practices to discern their effectiveness. Her inquiry is dynamic. She is not seeking ends, nor does she expect to find answers.

Lesson 2. It's A Matter Of Time
[10:30 a.m., February 11, 1991]

Carey, John, and Sarah are reading, belly flat, legs extended, lying together on pillows. Todd and Shawn are sitting at their quad. Todd is reading *The Witches* while Shawn is writing something in his journal. A copy of *Hatchet* lies open, next to him, on his desk. Most everyone is absorbed in reading. Ryan and Russ are reading together from Roald Dahl's *BFG.* They enjoy the language as it rolls off their tongues. They read in unison at times, taking turns at other times. They do this in a corner behind shelves of books where they will not disturb other readers. Jane is in the conference corner with Jen. Jen tells Jane that she thinks "Jess Ahrens really changes. At first he's just interested in winning the race but after Leslie wins, funny it was a girl, he is nicer then and cares more about other people." Jane has her note pad handy. She jots a note or two. Scott rummages through books in the class library. He is itching to walk around and check in with everybody. He cannot get into reading today. Michael, Jeremy, and Jamie curl into a single tangle under a table. Jen leaves the conference corner, walks over and taps Mary on the shoulder, "Ms. W. wants you." She nods toward Jane. Mary finishes the paragraph she is reading, gets up and heads for her conference. She tells Jane, "I just finished the part where Annemarie pulls the Star of David off Rachel's neck just before the soldiers walk in. That was so tense. I really like the way the author describes the dark room and that little gleam of light, then Annemarie sees the necklace and knows it will give them away." Jane studies Mary's face. "Would you rather go back and keep reading than conference today?" Mary beams, "Oh, yes, Ms. W." She races back to her desk and picks up *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry and resumes her reading. Jane conferences with Bob, then Tony. When she's finished, Russ and Ryan motion her to their corner. "We'd like to read some of this to the class. It's so funny." Their faces are flushed, and they begin laughing all over again. They read her a few lines. She laughs with them. Jane makes the announcement: "Russ and Ryan would like to share what they're reading. Write in your reading logs for a few minutes before they share. Think of some things you want to say about what you read today." A few students write, a few linger over what they're reading, others rustle papers. After a few minutes, Russ and Ryan walk to the front of the room. Everybody's laughing. Tears roll down Becka's cheeks. Scott is cradling his stomach in his arms. Andy asks Ryan if he can have the book next. Jane looks at the clock on the wall. "Time for recess."

The purposes and ways of reading in Jane's class are diverse and diversifying. The ongoing sense-making activities, including reading, sharing, and conferencing, contribute to both the social as well as the individual development of readers. The parameters for reading time are well defined. Regardless of restrictive quarters and close physical proximity, individual space is honored. Reading time is honored. Jane respects the students' space as well, giving Mary the freedom to return to her reading rather than usurping her rights with Jane's conference agenda. Russ and Ryan seek to share or make complete their reading experience for the day by sharing their pleasure with the rest of the class.

It has taken Jane over a semester to get routines in place so that a child seldom violates someone else's space or attention. "The time builds and they sustain the reading longer once they have the routine and really feel the importance and have developed a genuine interest in reading. Each grows into that at a different pace." Jane goes on to say that students begin with approximately fifteen-minute blocks, moving to twenty, then thirty minutes. "Now we devote more than an hour a day to what we call 'chapter book time'." Jane believes that students receive an implicit message of how important reading is by how much time is scheduled for it during the school day. Jane keeps in touch with each reader through conferences. As Mary's case illustrates, there are conflicting roles associated with Jane's intervention. She must ask herself when a conference is helpful to students and when it interferes. How can a conference prod children into thinking about ideas in the book? When is it important to take time for a mini-lesson? Jane knows that guidance helps and encourages her students.

Jane's classroom reflects her stated intention that "books are there within easy reach," her conception of the role of teacher as one who provides students with "constant immersion into literature," and her emphasis in curriculum on "receiving instruction when needed." Jane keeps trying to refine the structures and means for "bringing students together with literature," and this is evident throughout her inquiry. "I just try to ask the

questions that will help me figure out how to open the learning situation and keep students motivated." Jane feels the need to establish routines in reading that each child can follow. At first students learn to respect the routine and spend limited time engaged in reading. Later that changes. Choosing interesting selections, developing a repertoire of reading strategies, and learning about elements and conventions through conference sessions with teacher and peers become important facets of learning to read. Jane acts as a resource for her students' explorations. She describes reading conference sessions as times to "consider what is being learned and to generate further learning or the motivation for it." Jane describes her mental blueprint for conferences:

> First, I ask them to read a few pages to keep a feel for how fluent, expressive, and sense-making their oral reading is. I have notes from previous conferences and try to identify a critical concept that the child introduces there. Take Steve. He notices that the main character acts differently in different situations. This may seem easy, but not for fourth graders. Steve can't elaborate on when or how or why. I encourage him to follow by saying, "Think about that as you read the next few chapters and see if you can figure it out." Or I'll say, "Think about what would happen if the character didn't act differently in different situations." Sometimes it's a strategy. Some children don't visualize when they read. If I figure that out I ask questions: "What do you think the character looks like? What did you see on that hillside? What color do you think the buses are?" Anything to get them seeing.

Implicit in Jane's use of conferences is the introduction of a range of strategies and understandings about literature that Jane monitors as she discusses with her students. "I've learned that I need to listen to them and pick up from where they are. It isn't simple, and it's indefinite. I'm not always certain we're making progress. My heart tells me we are. It's central

to develop private reading habits, and it's hard to know how to help with that." Jane's principles of literature education can be further demonstrated in this excerpt from a conference:

[10:20 a.m., February 12, 1991]

Hannah: (Begins by reading two or three pages, picking up from where she was reading in Beverly Naidoo's [1986] *Journey to Jo'burg.)*

Jane: Did you figure out answers to your question from the other day now that you've read more? You asked, "Why do the black people tolerate the white people being so mean?"

Hannah: Well, yes and no. I just read the part where Tiro and Naledi see all those people being hit or screamed at. Some were arrested and taken away in vans because they didn't have passes. The whites have money and guns. The blacks don't. That helps me see why Tiro and Naledi's mother must obey her boss. I couldn't believe the white lady wouldn't let the mother have her own children sleep where she is living . . . after the long journey . . . I mean, none of it is fair, but I see now.

Jane: What do you see now?

Hannah: That they don't have choices. That they might as well be in prison. Their life isn't very good. I mean they walk miles and miles because they don't have money, very little food, and the doctor is far away.

Jane: How does the author help you see all this?

Hannah: Well, it's like we talked about with *Black Stallion* . . . . It's the way she describes things . . . and telling little things that make you think about how hard life is . . . like the children are cold and hungry and don't have enough milk. Their stomachs hurt because they're hungry.

Jane: I'm curious to know, because I haven't read this book, and I'd love to hear some of it, maybe one place where you noticed that.

Hannah: (Searches through pages before reading.) "The children weaved in and out among people as they ran along the stony road, between rows of gray block houses all looking exactly alike. No great leafy trees here, only gray smoke settling everywhere" [Naidoo, p. 30]. It's just sad they live like that.

Jane: I love the image of the stony road and the gray houses and smoke. I can see how gray life is.

Hannah: I didn't know that people live like this.

Jane: Do you think this is an important book to read?

Hannah: Oh, yes, because it's hard to imagine that kids, I mean my age, live this way, and it's not their fault or their mother's fault. They can't do much.

Jane: Why don't you read a chapter of this to the class. Would you like to do that? It's so opportune, here we have Mandela and South Africa in the news constantly, and yet we don't know what it's like. Literature can help us feel those feelings.

Hannah: Today?

Jane: If you'd like. Choose a section and practice a few minutes. If you'd rather wait until you finish that would be nice too.

Hannah: Yes, I will . . . I'll read today about when they find their mother. It's sad and so weird that they can't live with her. Maybe I'll read later about what happens . . . after I've finished. Do you think life can get better for them?

The conference demonstrates the view of what being able to read means in this class--to carry on conversations about what is read, to share that reading, to learn that questions are raised and answered tentatively, and that new questions appear with more reading or more thought. As Jane seeks to know what Hannah understands rather than what she does not understand, she invites Hannah into a discussion that affords her the opportunity to share and sort through what she is reading. Jane begins with oral reading to keep in touch with "how the children are reading." It is a safe environment. One

on one. Jane's lessons demonstrate her belief that we do not teach children to read; we let them and help them read by providing space and support.

Lesson 3. Who's Been Writing On The Wall?
[1:00 p.m., February 13, 1991]

Denise writes in large green letters, "It troubled Jack to see in these straits a girl who reminded him of the trees and the lawns of his home town" [Cheever, p. 58]. Jason finishes in bold red calligraphy, "Her voice was sweet, and reminded him of elms, of lawns, of those glass arrangements that used to be hung from porch ceilings to tinkle in the summer wind" [p. 59]. Audrey and Bob leaf through the pages of John Cheever's short story "Torch Song" for another quote. "Oh, here it is. Let's put this up." Bob begins to write in purple, "She stood by the hat rack, bathed in an intense pink light and the string music of heartbreak, swinging her mane of dark hair" [p. 57]. Scrawled in black above, "He began to think of her as The Widow . . . . She always wore black" [pp. 56-57]. Again, in black: "He had the impression that there had been a death there recently" [p. 60]. Kate and Elizabeth finish writing this cinquain above all the quotes:

Black Joan
dealing slow death
caught in her serene web
lured by her despairing "Torch Song"
Jack's trapped

To the side of their work, Andrea and Sue are searching for a final word for their cinquain:

Sweet Joan
a trail of men
nursing them through sickness
drugs, meanness, selfishness, greed, spite
"I've got it!" Sue scrawls:
Victim

"Perfect." Andrea steps back to admire the work. Joe brings the class together. "Now then," he surveys the butcher-paper graffiti wall they have been working on that is filled with sketches of Joan, cinquains, quotes, slogans, and questions. "So, what have you learned about this character, Joan?" Sue starts: "Andrea and I discussed how Jack is confused about how he feels from the first. He sees her as black and associated with the undertaker from the beginning. She's also serene and oblivious to the faults of the losers she's with . . . I think there is an attraction." Tony interrupts, "But death is everywhere and Jack finally catches on. It reminded me of the

knitting women in *Heart of Darkness.* She's just fate that he doesn't want to meet. Joan is death and that's dark and serene too." Joe sits on a stool, the graffiti on Joan as a backdrop. "It's a beautiful set-up job. Cheever lures us into the trap. I admit it. I thought Jack and Joan would get together . . . . You know, the happily ever after story. Weird. I didn't expect it to turn out the way it did." Randy looks around for a reaction to what he has said. Trina chimes in, "What do you mean how it ends? I don't know what is going to happen to Jack. Will he die? The story ends while he's trying to escape." "Yeah," Randy is thinking about it, "Well I just assumed because he packed up and was getting out that he might escape her." Kate adds, "At the end he's flushing nail clippings . . . wasn't it Pythagoras who believed if you left hair or nail clippings exposed the evil spirits could enter? I mean, he gets rid of all the signs." Lillian adds, "It's just too weird. I mean like we don't know about those powers." Morgan asks, "What was that deal with Pythagoras?" Kate clarifies, "Well it's just about superstitions, like we just don't know." Cyndi says, "Well that's just the point. We don't know and that's the way Cheever wanted it. Joe ends, "Think about how Cheever can make us feel so many ways at the same time. You've shown that here." He points to the graffiti wall. The bell rings.

As Joe's reading lesson illustrates, we can learn much by stepping back to watch students formulate and reformulate their views. The graffiti wall evidences their journey. The writing on the wall helps Joe document students' thinking. Joe believes that he learns a good deal about how to proceed from listening to the students talk as they work through their understandings on the graffiti wall. "They don't feel the need to play intellectual games with ideas in this situation--slick talk isn't necessary." They rehearse ideas on the wall and come to grips with Joan as a character. "She's always the perplexing character. When kids read this story, they spend time wanting to figure her out and figure out why Cheever gives her such distinct sides." After such explorations, the students bring more opinions to class discussions. "It certainly gets more students involved in a discussion because they've had time to work through their thinking." Joe's discussion of practice echoes his perception of a literature curriculum that emphasizes "students' explorations of puzzling through, sorting out." Joe questions, finds ways to extend the students' thinking, and nudges them into new ways of seeing. Joe forecasts the sequence that will follow the graffiti wall:

> From the looks of the wall, they're going to bring up the Fates--*Heart of Darkness, Macbeth*--and they'll take that back to their own lives and talk about fate. This would be my prediction of how it will go. I've started them. Most of it will unfold now. We'll end by writing original character pieces where they'll show multiple sides of a person. They'll write or create performances of multiple faces.

Several days later when I returned to the classroom, students were in a workshop session. Denise, Sue, and Audrey had written an original script, a *Three Faces of Eve* piece, which they intended to perform for the class. As they planned it, each girl would read a monologue or soliloquy that would show one facet of a character's personality. They were discussing costumes, hairdos, and appropriate make-up to represent each face. Bev, Ralph, Sarah, and Jen were working on a similar script with an additional complication. Two characters have four personalities. Each personality knows one of the other character's personalities. The personalities get crossed and have a new meeting. Many students were working on short stories, individually or collaboratively.

Joe's purpose to "get inside the literature and live it through performance" and his belief that the literature teacher "facilitates entrances through which students can bridge what they know and don't know" were reflected in this assignment sequence. And Joe was having the time of his life--listening, laughing, questioning, getting students over the hard parts when they got stuck, and reassuring them. Plenty of that. All of the students were working hard, trying to make the words bring meaning to their visions of the way things should be. Jamie asked Sarah for help in creating believable male talk. Students sat in clusters reading to one another. "Mr. C., I just can't figure it out," Elizabeth whined. "Well, let's hear it, Elizabeth. Read a few lines." Joe sits back, his arms cradling the back of his head, and listens. "So what do you think is the problem?" he asks her.

Reading the Mediating Voice of Contexts

Witnessing these classes, I thought how each demonstrates an understanding in practice that is acted into meaning. Each teacher advances into practice some principles that validate student voice and exploration. They do not do this in the same ways or even for the same purposes, as was demonstrated in the analysis of their beliefs and planning. The complexities of thinking, judging, planning, and reacting were overwhelming as I watched each classroom enactment and studied the teacher's thought and preparation behind each event. In the broadest sense, the participants planned within a range of possibilities and read a map of contexts in their classrooms that helped produce their representations of how the classroom text might unfold in concrete realizations.

Idealized conceptions of classrooms, as well as the worst case scenarios, are challenged by the realities of classrooms such as these. The first three reading lessons reveal that some of the criticism, such as that found in Kutz and Roskelly's (1991) *An Unquiet Pedagogy,* may be too general and overstated:

> Often, they may make small alterations that seem to change traditional activities . . . . But the changes don't seem to affect overall structure, and the patterns of traditional instruction repeat themselves . . . nothing in the preparation of most teachers will help them design the work of the classroom in ways that support the development of readers of literature. (pp. 6-7)

The observations of Jane's, Beth's, and Joe's classroom events and intentions did not provide evidence of small alterations or patterns of traditional instruction repeating themselves. These participants' reading lessons were not sleights of hand on an unsuspecting audience, but real attempts to come to terms with what learning and teaching literature means. Understanding the complexities of what we see in classrooms may lead us to

state more carefully such generalizations about teachers' products and to concentrate more attention on the purposes, and on the teachers' processes, for even the smallest changes.

Too often the critics of teachers have read classroom texts in ways that literature teachers have been cautioned not to teach literature. If teachers' motivations and behaviors are generalized, if the events and actions are hastily interpreted without considering context, and if evaluation occurs before careful attention to the details of the text, the reading is generally considered to be hastily rendered or flawed. It is in this sense that a reader of the classroom text can end up collapsing students, teacher, text, and contexts in an interpretive act that does not account for the complexities. These lessons demonstrate that teaching is a process and that teachers and researchers alike might come to value generating, inventing, revising, and editing the composition of the classroom text. I would suggest that to value a process approach in teaching enhances the dynamic character of teaching. In every lesson described herein there is a product goal as well. Students will develop strategies that aid them as readers. The goal takes many forms in these lessons, but the evolving classroom text bears the individual signature of each teacher.

Joe, Beth, and Jane are teachers who have the ability to look carefully at the learning going on in their classrooms, to find ways of fostering further learning, and to consider how what they teach is integrally related to how students learn. They have the capacity to question and to search. It is important to note that their practices continue to evolve in various revisions of the classroom texts they compose. Revisions occur when these teachers think differently about what goes on in their classrooms. They search out practices to test their ways of thinking, which leads to new assumptions and further revision. Experience, theory, ideology, and practice are closely interlinked in conceptualizing these revisions. From such reconceptualizations, new classroom texts are composed.

Leading to an Inquiry of Possibility

In Bruner's (1986) conception of social invention, "Culture is as much a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning and for explicating action as it is a set of rules or specifications for action. . . . Storytelling, theater, science, even jurisprudence, are all techniques for intensifying this function--ways of exploring possible worlds out of the context of immediate need (p. 123). Keeping within the spirit of negotiating and recreating meaning, Jane, Joe, Beth, and I struggled to reach mutual understandings that could accommodate our joint understandings of practice. Each of us will come to make of this what we may, but the meaningfulness of the inquiry led us to honor our diverse ways of knowing and to realize there are no easy or simple recipe solutions. As teachers, we are required to construct these classrooms anew--to rename, to remake, to reconsider our systems of meaning in continuing and daily dialogue on teaching. Engaging in shared inquiry and interpretation, in seeking to understand one another's perspective rather than to impose a perspective on one another, we learned how to engage in conversations about teaching and learning literature, how to work beyond our silences, and how to inquire into what held possibilities for future exploration.

Our conversations were an essential outlet for us to step back and rethink our personal assumptions and practices. Early on we established a relationship that encouraged joint construction of meaning rather than one that transformed Beth, Jane, and Joe into subjects of research who have little or no control over the interpretation of their work. We avoided tight agendas or specific questions to guide the interviews. Rather, we kept open the space through which we could examine assumptions, beliefs, or practices without feeling the pressure to cover particular agendas. This necessitated creating blocks of time to talk and to build mutual understandings. I would like to share some of the incidents that demonstrate how this worked. Engaging in shared inquiry and interpretation did lead to some conceptual understandings about the nature of Joe's, Beth's, and Jane's inquiry. This was most obvious when what had taken place in the classroom became a critical incident that

was the focus of further inquiry. The following accounts of one such incident for each teacher illustrate the potential of inquiry to inform the practice of possibility.

Questioning the Reading Quiz

At the beginning of the class session described earlier, in which students created a graffiti wall, Joe gave a ten-minute reading quiz, which included questions such as these: What was Jack's attitude toward Joan at the end of the story? What was Joan's most common way of helping the men in her life? Why did Jack lose his job? Where did Joan and Jack meet?

This quiz did not make sense in terms of *what I had constructed* to be Joe's approach to teaching literature. In my notes, I jotted the words "discrepancy" and "incongruity." While students took the quiz, I considered what to make of this. I had to remind myself that the purpose should be to find out Joe's reasoning behind the quiz. I asked him after class. "Easy," he said. "If they haven't read it, there's not much point in going on." Joe gives reading quizzes often, and he views these as an incentive to read. Joe suggested that students' jobs, sports activities, or television-mania often get in the way of reading for class. The quiz became a fact of life. "There's always a reading quiz before we get on to the real stuff." We continued in what became, as I've come to label it, an *inquiry of possibility*:

Ruth: Do you ever question whether there are other ways to accomplish the same thing?

Joe: Not really. I've concentrated on other areas. I don't know how to do a song and dance for them to get this done. So, I do what's worked. If they've read, they usually get twenty-five points.

Ruth: Is this quiz representative of most reading quizzes you'd give?

Joe: Sure. I mostly ask literal questions. I'm not trying to get them into . . . like the Bloom thing. They're not ready. This is a fragile reading and I don't want to make much out of it. That comes later.

Ruth: I know . . . I mean you've said, and I've seen that you want students to read in thoughtful ways. Is it possible that knowing they'll have a literal quiz encourages them to do a literal first reading?

Joe: (After a long pause.) I hadn't thought about that before, so the question spins around in my head. I alternately say: 1) Literal is OK for a first reading. 2) Is it? Or do we need an engaged read? 3) It works, so leave it alone. 4) How else would I do it? 5) How much time would it take if I changed? 6) Do I even know how to change it? It gets complicated.

Ruth: You've made me think about my own classrooms. I don't check to see if students have read. I make the assumption they have. I'm wondering now if that is something that should be taken for granted. Some students may never read, and then I wonder if what we do in class makes much difference.

Joe: Well, I think that's my point. They're cheated and so am I if we go to all this work to find meaningful ways to examine what they've read if some of them read piecemeal between the talk, activities, or any of that.

Ruth: I wonder if that matters. Are you suggesting that a fragmented reading is worse than a literal read? I mean . . . I'm not sure.

Joe: I think it matters. They need a complete reading of the piece to see it together before they take it apart.

Ruth: Does that become a quick skim for the test, and, if it does, will that reading work against, for example . . . well, I know how much time you spend on looking at crafting?

Joe: I hadn't thought about that. I'm not even sure where I'd start to work this out or figure it out.

Ruth: Where would you start?

Joe: (Pauses.) First, I'd talk to these kids. They've had a semester plus doing this. I could ask them questions about the reading they do, their attitudes about it . . . . If you have time tomorrow come back, and we can bring this up with them. We'll enlighten them a bit about the questions we're coming up with. (Laughs.)

Ruth: What do you expect we'll hear?

Joe: Probably that it doesn't make much difference. I think I'd call it a neutral read. But, they'll surprise us. We'll ask.

Ruth: What if you hear that it does affect their attitude, their reading, in negative ways, or suggests this is school reading for all you try to work against that?

Joe: Then, I've got to find other ways. And maybe there are different ways for different pieces.

The conversation moved on to other issues, but this excerpt illustrates one example of how we came to question whether the practice of giving reading quizzes may influence the way students will engage in the reading. For Joe, it was a non-issue until it was moved beyond my notes, my attitude, and my interpretation of what he did. I needed to hear his reasoning, challenge that reasoning through questions, and challenge my own understanding by listening without judging. This became a conversation that introduced areas of exploration for both of us.

Joe was challenged to look at this practice, determine its value, revise it if necessary, or find, as he describes it, a "neutral practice" that he will choose to continue with. He obviously has other areas where he focuses energy and attention. He will, however, never think about reading quizzes in quite the same way. It was revealing that Joe was willing to take this discussion to students for their reactions. He does consider them to be experts on the learning that goes on in the class, and he values their opinions. Interestingly, one of the students said, "Oh, you mean you have a choice. I thought that was something you were required to do." The students' perception of the teacher as technician is alive in schools. Joe's openness in discussing this issue allowed the students to reconsider the role of Joe as a teacher in planning the classroom, and they were extended an invitation to participate in reflection on practices as well.

The students could not suggest with any definiteness how reading quizzes affect their first readings. Jason suggested that the class could experiment with various types of quizzes to "distinguish different ways of

reading. I need to think about how I read now that I'm aware. I'll monitor my mind." Elizabeth stated that she has "learned to read for the quiz, and I can pretty much take any story and skim it in ten minutes and get the grade." Joe cringed. Randy said the quiz gives him "a focus, a starting look, and it doesn't usually hurt my grade, so I'm used to it." The problem of whether to give reading quizzes wasn't solved, but Joe must consciously consider the impact of his quizzes on students' reading of texts. As Joe stated months later, "What happens in these conversations was that they create an uncertainty, a disequilibrium. These are the places that need to be examined and explored."

When the Reading Journal Fails

In field notes, while I was observing in Jane's class, I had written several times, "Talk to Jane about why she has students keep a reading journal." In the earlier description of her classroom, I noted that she had students write in logs before the end of reading time. I wasn't certain of what her motivations were, or of her method for providing feedback or validation--whether she responded to the journals, or whether students responded to one another. When this issue surfaced for discussion, the students were reading one of the few shared class novels, *Sarah, Plain and Tall.*

The following excerpt is taken from one of the follow-up discussions to observation in which Jane and I explored her use of the reading journal.

Ruth: I was interested that the children objected to the journal writing on *Sarah.* How do you interpret their attitudes?

Jane: I guess I knew they'd say that because . . . I mean, they did it, but without any heart in it. They'd write and go on, but it was obvious they weren't interested. I know I didn't like the way that part turned out.

Ruth: I'd written in my notes that I felt something wasn't quite working in that either. What was happening?

Jane: One of the things is that they write in their real journal every day. That's where they work on their own pieces. Maybe this was just too much journal for a day. Next time, I would either not do journals or I'd make journals the center of it.

Ruth: Well, it strikes me now that you've said real journals that they may sense a difference in how important you think it is. So, I'm wondering . . . did you value these journals in the same way you do their personal writing?

Jane: (Pauses.) Interesting you mention that because I was thinking the other night that I'd just left the reading journals filed, and I didn't read or respond . . . . I meant to . . . but I think that was a weakness . . . . It's probably the way I set it up and may not have valued their responses or getting them to share with me and each other. I think I got in a hurry and you know, Ruth, I'm nervous trying a group novel, and part of me thought they needed questions on each day's reading. But now I really need to question that.

Ruth: As you look at it now, do you think those questions did help? I'm wondering because they seemed so involved in the skits and projects. Was it necessary?

Jane: In retrospect I think it's just something I thought I should do. But I was thinking about what I've read. Reading logs seem to be the thing. Maybe I didn't think through why I thought they'd help these children, and with all the other writing they do maybe this was just extra that wasn't very meaningful.

Ruth: When you say that, I start to think about dialogue journals with partners or dialogue with the teacher. Any way that might be useful?

Jane: I wish I knew if I even would. If I did, I might start with dialogue with me. I just think they need to know I'm interested. Maybe with each other . . . . I guess the idea is to forecast like we're doing now. I could probably have known before rather than after which questions are good . . . or, I don't mean good but important questions. When questions are right there is an intenseness in their writing or talk. I probably could almost imagine which would do that.

As we continued the conversation, I was struck by what Jane had said about imagining and forecasting. Understanding the work of teaching may

arise from the forecasting and imagining of possibilities. Part of the teacher's work may be understood in such forecasting constructions. We talked about this in more detail in subsequent discussions. Jane constructed her own meaning from the inquiry. As she said later, "It's been helpful for me to consider possibilities and imagine how students will react. I've so often thought it would be nice to do something several ways and then decide. In a way, I'm learning to do that in my head."

A second issue raised in our conversation was Jane's awareness about her lack of validation in the students' reading journals. As we pursued that point, Jane came to question how her uncertainty with reading journals was related to questions about evaluating what students write. We discussed whether she felt there was a need for evaluation or whether response might be more in keeping with her goals. She began to tie this idea to her beliefs in and her format for reading conferences. "I could ask questions. Prod them into elaborating or connecting. Really talking on paper." She came to believe that response and evaluation may be distinct or, at least, might serve different purposes.

These conversations led Jane to consider several issues in her teaching life. Her idea of forecasting, playing out the possibilities of what might happen and how students might respond, led her, first, to reconsider ways and means of planning lessons, or at least to validate and articulate her plan. Second, she considered the difference between evaluation and response and came to the conclusion that each may serve different purposes depending on her goals, but that she needs to think through the intent in the context of specific cases. "Never again do I want to just do something because I've read or heard or just thought it would be good. Each group varies, and I'm not willing to act without good reasons."

There's a Secret in the Text

The plan: Students will talk about their personal interpretations of what they read. The problem: Students resist this idea. Old habits die hard. Beth said

her eighth graders assume that there is a *single* secret in every text. If they find the right key, they will unlock it. Beth expressed her frustration with breaking those attitudes as she was discussing her plans for teaching *Flowers For Algernon.*

"I've realized that *saying* they bring part of the meaning to what they read just has not convinced them. I think the more perceptive ones are starting to see it. I find they resist the idea and still want to know if they're right." Beth has decided that in *Flowers* she will try to plan a frontal assault on that resistance, but she struggles with how to do it.

Beth: I try to get at the idea there are lots of secrets in a text. They'll each find different ones, and we'll share those.

Ruth: Do you use the word "secrets" with them?

Beth: Yes, I do. I've said that for years, I think because I want them to get excited about what they'll find in whatever they're reading. I used to believe there was one secret myself, and I'd guide students by the nose to get them there. Now, I really try to say let's look for lots of secrets.

Ruth: I guess I'm wondering what the word secret means to them. If I tell you I've found out a secret for making good spaghetti sauce, isn't it still spaghetti sauce in the end? I'm wondering what connotation they carry for that word "secret."

Beth: That you've unlocked--oh, I wonder--I mean, *maybe I'm passing on that fraud.* I know I've opened up and want to honor as many different meanings . . . it may still have one meaning (at least as they're interpreting it). Maybe I'm carrying my old language with me as baggage that sends different messages than what I think I'm saying.

Ruth: I'm not certain. I know I reacted to the word "secret" in a less than positive way. It's tied for me to the reaction I've had when people talk about unlocking puzzles in poems. I don't think of reading meaning as a puzzle. So, "secret" struck me that way. I don't know how students hear it.

Beth: Well I know they resist. I think it might help to bring the language issues up in class and maybe take a piece . . . . Of course they have a long history of reading in this other way and

it's hard to break that. Because this project with you is on my mind, and how we searched back through our histories to look for assumptions. I could get them to do the same.

Ruth: What did you get out of that search that you think might help them see reading differently?

Beth: Why I believe the way I do. They might be able to pinpoint places where they've been honored for those less than creative readings. As I think about it, a reader's history might be good. I can think how to tie in with *Algernon* too. That idea of our developing histories--I could almost get them to go back and do like diary entries that show their development of understandings about reading and lead them to today. I could emphasize change throughout and work consistently (it's a long piece) to keep exploring the idea.

Beth focuses on her students' resistance to accepting that a literary text may have multiple meanings. Beth struggles to discover *why* students have those perceptions and considers two factors that might be influential. First, Beth's language in describing the concept may guide students to certain meanings. Second, students' histories as readers may lead them to believe in or validate certain ways of reading. Beth has determined ways to explore both of these influences as she continues her search.

Beth questions her own way of reframing students' understandings about what they contribute to a text and takes steps to act on what might be their misunderstandings by deliberately talking about the idea, connecting it to *Algernon,* and considering ways to explore the idea of multiple meanings. The dialogic has led her to an inquiry of possibility. By searching for possible causes and avenues of inquiry, Beth can compose alternatives. Beth demonstrates her ability to theorize about her own processes in composing teaching decisions. Additionally, Beth struggles with the concept of how to balance this concern with reading, keeping in mind the nature of the students with whom she works. Beth indicates that junior high students are frightened by anyone who is different because "they are trying so hard to fit in. Now maybe that's even a bit of what is behind their resistance." As Beth continues

to reflect on this, she determines that their fears of being different may cause some resistance. Although Beth has cast the dilemmas and possible resolutions, she knows that it will take conscious and continuous effort to extend and elaborate what she has determined as seeds for her resolutions.

The inquiry of possibility allowed Beth, Joe, and Jane to reframe understandings, practices, and dilemmas. During the several months of our inquiry together, the participants and I learned that reframing required reseeing, reunderstanding, and rehearing diverse incidents, practices, or dilemmas. The inquiry of possibility emphasizes the dynamic between thinking and acting. Situations become problematical for these teachers if and when they consciously evoke them into awareness. When knowing moves beyond what Alfred Schutz (1962) conceptualizes as "recipe knowledge," it becomes knowing through critically examined alternatives. Then, the inquiry of possibility becomes a liberating inquiry that opens the dialogue between what is and what can be. According to Joe, "I came to see that there is a trust that truth and rightness don't exist, but choice and possibilities do." As Beth said in her final interview, "One thing that became clear to me is that the teachers' ultimate goal is to help students develop as thinking individuals. To do that, teachers must be rethinking constantly. That isn't a sign of weakness but of strength." As I eavesdropped on the teaching lives of Beth, Joe, and Jane, I came to honor their diverse ways of knowing and coming to know. In diversity, not in formula, these teachers examine and explore ways to compose the texts of their classrooms.

Ongoing Conversations

I do not believe that I can name or define Beth's, Jane's, and Joe's realities, but I have tried to give an account of some formulations, processes, and outcomes of their inquiry. One of the challenges in doing so was how to do justice to the complexities without attempting to codify what is embedded, idiosyncratic, and often circuitous. The discussion presented here is only a small part of what is difficult to represent without a more holistic and

dialectical method that might more nearly characterize the inquiry. Nevertheless, three essential principles, or "essentials," summarize what I learned from the months we spent together:

Essential 1. Practice As Process

How is it that we have come to view practice as a product rather than a process? With all our talk of learning to read, to write, and to think as processes, how has the act itself, the practice of teaching, been overlooked as a process? Although practice as product is the observable act, teaching, as Joe, Beth, and Jane demonstrate, is process. That was never clearer in this study than when Beth, after a class session where the discussion had become rambling and nearly stagnant made this observation:

> Two voices in me were working simultaneously. One voice kept the class going forward on the path that had reached a dead end. The other voice kept asking, "What's gone wrong here? Where was the wrong turn? How can we get out of this?" Searching for options . . . trying to think of a . . . well . . . a spark of an idea to get us back on or to think of a way to stop this and reorganize. I was caught between the thinking and not being ready to act on it. That was the time to stop the class and say, "What is going on here and how can we get this working better?"

Beth offers yet another dimension of process--the dynamic between thinking and acting. The product of Beth's lesson, from the teacher and observer's standpoint, was a sluggish and dull discussion. But the interior thought process Beth describes captures the inquiry of possibility. Caught in the dynamic of rehearsal, she might have acted thought into meaning. She might have chosen to stop what was going on and engage the students in the rehearsal of meaning as well. A capacity to see one's work as process and a willingness to engage students in co-creating the process are necessary if both

teacher and students are to take a reflective stance on teaching and learning.

Essential 2. Telling and Asking

Working within the school culture may not determine, but does affect, teachers' images of possible and desirable teaching and learning. Many of these images legitimate and justify schools as they are. Others work through the dialectic to challenge what can be. The teaching of literature has a culture with accompanying rituals and images. The traditional ones, on the one hand, depict classrooms where students explicate texts, journey through metaphor, symbol, or light and dark images. Teachers guide the interpretation of canonical pieces that the educated student must have read and understood. Students sit in desks with their books open.

On the other hand, we have images of classrooms that challenge this. Students are partners in the learning. In reading and writing workshops, through negotiations of the curriculum, by honoring multiple meanings or self-selection of texts, and through engaging in conversations that build mutual understandings, teachers and students are involved in an inquiry of possibility that resists, challenges, and continuously alters the rituals and images of a literature culture that are depicted in traditional dichotomies. Becoming smug or complacent is a false consciousness. To continuously demystify what is mystified in the artifacts of our literature education cultures is a form of inquiry that can rise above the rhetoric that too often offers simplistic solutions.

The committed literature teacher must keep inquiring: If transactional or reader response is the answer, what are the questions? If uncommon sense is the answer, what are the questions? If reading and writing workshops are the answer, what are the questions? If democracy in education is the answer, what are the questions? If whole language is the answer, what are the questions? The questions are raised, not answered, through an inquiry of possibility. Finding the critical incidents in belief and practice, the "unsettling triggers," and the dilemmas and contradictions can lead to intentional

reflection. This essential principle is clearly illustrated by Jane:

> The people I come in contact with through reading, in classes, in rooms next to my own or across town, don't often give me answers. They raise more questions. The questions create dilemmas that take time to formulate into alternatives. I really can't accept the Nancy Atwell way or the Thomas Newkirk way. I love the classrooms they describe, but wouldn't it be sort of . . . like being a partner who only imitates someone else's view of say . . . creation. I'm thinking of the Sistine Chapel. I'm no Michelangelo, and I wouldn't want to spend my energy or imagination or individuality replicating his view of the finger of God touching Adam. I have my own ways, but that means I need to solve my own problems. Sure, I find the questions through contact with others, but seldom the answers.

Jane calls into question the idea that we can represent someone else's view of reality or someone else's inquiry into the possibilities. To see Jane's work in classrooms as processes of composing rather than as a set of disconnected, effective or noneffective, contradictory, or ideologically defective practices may lead us to a more adequate representation of teachers' constructive work. Recognizing the need to challenge rituals and myths of the literature education culture is the first step in taking an active role in the inquiry of possibility. The consequences are paradoxical, for we generate more questions, more uncertainty, and more complexity. Dialogic conversations with oneself or with others provide a way of formulating the questions. Kincheloe (1991) describes his hope for transformation of the teacher from "classroom technician to active political agent" and the need for teachers to foster "the indispensable qualities that are mandated by knowledge production: critical reflection, a desire to act, discomfort, uncertainty, restless inquiry" (p. 21).

Essential 3. The Motivation for Inquiry

If teachers produce knowledge as practice, it is a far different act from presenting rehearsals of knowledge through practice. On the one hand, practice appears static and simplistic. On the other, it is dynamic and complex. The inquiry of possibility is an intellectual as well as affective journey of discovery. It is not an easy journey along a linear path, nor does it have a City on the Hill as destination. Rather, it is a journey of perspectives, of personal and social histories, of uncertainty, and of challenge. So what is to motivate teachers, throughout their long careers, to continuously compose and revise the meaning they make of their work? Throughout this study, Joe, Beth, and Jane expressed what motivates them to inquire. One common thread was their need to confront the rapidly changing views of teaching and learning literature.

As Beth stated, "I've always enjoyed analyzing situations, looking within--introspection, I guess I'd call it. It's just exhilarating." Seeing alternatives can keep the motivation strong. Jane suggests that she feels most comfortable when she has a repertoire of strategies on which to draw. This builds confidence and trust in her ability to act and react. It provides motivation to push the inquiry even further. "And when I do, I'm more critical of accepting someone else's formula for doing things." A person must walk the path to develop wisdom on a journey. Being transported to the destination is not particularly satisfying. Joe expressed this in a way I would be hard pressed to paraphrase:

> Inquiry is a form of literacy all its own. When we abandon possibility, someone else will step in to take control, leaving us with our complacency. Reinventing is hard work and the labor of it may be a form of mind masochism, but to neglect it is to let someone else co-opt the power.

Hearing these teachers discuss their work shatters the myth that most teachers mindlessly rather than mindfully attend to their teaching lives. Yet the view permeates society's view of teachers' work. It stains what teacher education is or ought to be by reinforcing the idea that teachers can be trained as technicians. The insult is perpetuated in classrooms by teachers who do not make explicit the complexity of their work with students. To make explicit this complexity is an act that alone could begin to dispel notions of teachers as marginalized reproducers of someone else's knowledge. As teachers begin to speak about the complexities of their work, they may reclaim the right to move beyond the demands for vague accountabilities or prescriptive measures for student performance and into critical composing of their teaching lives. The inquiry of possibility becomes a liberating inquiry as well. A liberating inquiry opens the dialogue between what is and what can be. To reiterate Joe's insight, "I came to see that there is a trust that truth and rightness don't exist, but choice and possibilities do." Liberating inquiry yokes belief with action and possibility.

If we begin to look behind the act, the formula, the answers to the causes, conditions, and contexts; if we begin to describe and identify the multiplicity of causes, conditions, and contexts; if we recognize the value of what is unsaid as much as of what is said; and if we begin to refashion frameworks for exploring and understanding teaching as a composing process--then we might learn to challenge, reinvent, and retheorize what becoming a teacher means.

If we find that the articulation of these meanings helps us to actualize who we are and what we are about as teachers, then I suggest, again, that we learn to read our teaching histories for the same reason that we read any text--to open a field of inquiry. If meaning becomes the product of our engagement with this teaching text, we are cast in the role of questioner, critic, and creator of our teaching lives. Composing a teaching life, like composing any text, requires rehearsals of meaning. There is nothing linear or tidy in the process. Too often, the search is for certainty. Joe, Beth, and

Jane taught me to search for something else.

I stood back again and looked at myself as the subject of my history. I forgot for a time that I was doing anything more than trying to understand for myself the disparity between my all-night rehearsals of what the classroom text might and could be and what, in fact, happened in my classrooms beneath the fluorescent lights during daylight hours. Once upon a time I believed in answers--intoxicating, reductive answers. Inquiring with Beth, Joe, and Jane led me to more fully trust in tentativeness. I can better articulate the struggles in composing a teaching life. A teacher's identity is tied to becoming and imagining what is possible. The creative tension that results leads to continuous reconstructions of the classroom text, and the journey is inherently interesting. The inquiry became an unquiet time, a series of rehearsals of meaning, a series of temporary perspectives on particular moments and segments of that time. And I thought I knew about teachers and teaching literature.

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